“Easy Moveables”: Life-Writing, the Thief, and the Circulation of Objects in Eighteenth-Century Britain, 1724-1774.



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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Hilary 2016

Word count: 88,285

À mes parents, Arnlaug et François
et à ma grand-mère, Béatrice.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the representation of male thieves in eighteenth-century criminal life-writing is shaped by their relationship with objects, and shaped differently according to the nature of those objects. In spite of its formulaic, lowbrow and often uninspired characteristics, criminal literature proves in this respect a prime site for literary experimentation. Texts about criminals occupy a liminal space between high and low culture, a position mirrored by that of the criminals themselves and the objects they steal, as they circulate at the margins of legal society. The thieves' own hybridity is translated in the genres adopted by their biographers, ranging from poorly-written journalistic prose, more or less edifying sermons, to a plethora of literary forms such as plays or even epistolary fiction. The prevalence of objects as drivers of narrative affects every aspect of the criminal's life, and invites investigation of matters of belonging, copyright, domesticity, gentility, and masculinity. Defined by their refusal, or inability, to conform with socially acceptable behaviours and occupation, thieves depend on their mastery of objects and the significations of those objects to succeed, whether in making a profit or evading arrest and execution. In accounts of thieves' lives, conversely, objects become animated and acquire a life of their own, dominating the narrative and representation, so that thieves themselves are in turn transformed into things, or manipulated into new functions.

The thief's relationship to objects varies in terms of both his own mobility and that of the objects he steals and fences. Hence, the thesis falls into two separate parts; the first considers London footpads and housebreakers, while the second is focused on highwaymen. While the London criminal circles might be seen as forming parallel dysfunctional underworld societies, highwaymen are more often treated as solitary

itinerants at most in social relationship with an accomplice or a horse. I do not discuss female criminality except in so far as it plays a part in the biographies of the male felons examined here, as life-writing centred around criminal women focuses mostly on their illicit sexual practices rather than their relationship with the material world.

An introductory chapter situates the analysis in relation to social, legal, and literary norms and conventions of the period as well as recent departures in critical thinking relevant to this thesis, such as thing theory and histories of material culture. Each subject chapter then investigates closely the distinctive and often carefully distinguished nature of an individual's relationship with objects in the numerous publications that narrate his life. The first part of this thesis focuses on a London criminal underworld circle of the beginning of the century, each chapter dealing with one criminal figure in a group centred around the best known of them: Jonathan Wild. The first chapter is dedicated to footpad and housebreaker Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin (1700-1724), and his evolution from violent thug to picaresque figure. The next chapter follows escapist John Sheppard (1702-1724) and his struggle against material indicators of repressive legal power. The third chapter focuses on famed thief-taker and gang leader Jonathan Wild (1683-1725) and his peculiar position within eighteenth-century economic, criminal, and literary markets through his relationship with the material world. The second part of the thesis is centred on socially and geographically mobile highwaymen. It begins with a discussion of Dick Turpin (1705-1739) and his recreation and corruption of domestic structures. The next chapter is dedicated to James Maclaine, the Gentleman Highwayman (1724-1750), famed for his performative gentility, in which we observe character represented as possession. Finally, the last chapter focuses on John Rann, alias Sixteen-Strings Jack (ca1750-1774), and explores the representations of his sartorial choices in the context of popular gentility and masculinity.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful for the support, expertise and guidance of my supervisor, Prof. Ros Ballaster, without whom this project would never have come to fruition. I will be forever in her debt. My thesis has also benefited greatly from the help and feedback of Prof. Freya Johnston, Dr. Giles Bergel, Prof. Christine Gerrard, and Prof. Fiona Stafford. I would also like to thank Dr. Matthew Jenkins and Dr. Kate Compton, who shared their expertise on the York book trade.

The staff at the following institutions have always been more than helpful: the Bodleian Library, the University of Oxford's English Faculty Library, the British Library, the British Museum, the York Libraries & Archives, and the York Minster Library. Bursaries for the Digital Humanities at Oxford Summer School 2015 and the COST Digital Humanities Conference and Training School 2015 gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and understanding of digital research tools and materials.

My thesis also benefited from the input of the members of the Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society, as well as the Long Eighteenth-Century Research in Progress Seminar, Oxford. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Grace Egan and Dr. Octavia Cox for their help and friendship.

My friends and family have been nothing but loving and supportive throughout my time in Oxford. I would particularly like to thank Marie Chardon, proof-reader extraordinaire, Monique Michniewski, Maria Kallionpää, Ahona Panda, Stéphanie Vuillemenot, Aude Pidoux, Solveig Sautier-Reymondin, Damien Sautier, and Dr. Robert Leek. Rob has stood by me and kept me sane through the highs and the lows, a debt in gratitude I will never be able to repay fully. Finally, this thesis would not have seen the light of day without the support of my parents, François Pidoux et Arnlaug Pidoux-Johnsen, and my grandmother, Béatrice Pidoux-Mercier. This thesis is dedicated to them.

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List of abbreviations

BR64 *The Bloody Register. A Select and Judicious Collection of the Most Remarkable Trials, for Murder, Treason, Rape, Sodomy, Highway Robbery, Pyracy, House-Breaking, Perjury, Forgery, and other high Crimes and Misdemeanors. From the Year 1700, to the Year 1764 inclusive* (London: Printed for E. and M. Viney, in Ivy-Lane, near Pater-noster-Row, and sold by all Booksellers and Stationers in Town and Country, 1764).

ERR25 *The English Rogue Revived: or, the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker. Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Footpad, and John Sheppard, Housebreaker. Taken from several Writings found since Jonathan's Death, which never was Publish'd before* (London: Printed by Dan. Pratt over against York House in the Strand, [1725?]).

HLA25 *The History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Footpad, and John Sheppard, Housebreaker ...* (London: Printed for Edward Midwinter at the Looking-Glass, upon London Bridge, 1725).

JGHL34 Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, &c. To which is added, A Genuine Account of the Voyages and Plunders of the most Notorious Pyrates. Interspersed with several diverting Tales, and pleasant Songs. ... By Capt. Charles Johnson* (London: Printed and Sold by J. Janeway, in White Fryers; and by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1734).

JNCN95 William Jackson, *The New and Complete Newgate Calendar; or, Villany displayed in all its Branches. Containing New and Authentic Accounts of all the Lives, Adventures, Exploits, Trials, Executions, and Last Dying Speeches, Confessions (as well as Letters to their Relatives never before published) of the most notorious Malefactors* (London: Printed for the Proprietors. Published by Alex. Hogg, in No. 16, Paternoster-Row; And sold by all Booksellers and Newsmen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, 1795).

LAMNH59 *The Lives and Adventures of The most notorious Highway-waymen [sic], Street Robbers, and Murderers. Giving a very particular Account of the various Methods practised by Rogues of every Class in the Execution of their Villainies. And Containing some curious Relations not to be met with in any other Book of this Kind* (London: Printed for H. Woodgate and S. Brooks at the Golden Ball in Paternoster-Row, 1759).

LMRC35 *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals who have been Condemn'd and Executed; Either for the Highway, Street Robberies, Burglaries, Murders, or other Capital Offences* (London: Printed and Sold by John Hosborn at the Golden-Ball in Pater-Noster-Row, 1735).

MGHL58 Mackdonald, *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the most*

Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Pirates, Street-Robbers, and Thief-Takers. ... By Capt. Mackdonald (London: Printed for J. Warcus's, at the Indian Queen at the Poultry, and H. Serjeant, at the Star without Temple Bar, 1758).

MGTH48 James MackLecan, *A General and True History of the Lives and Actions Of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Street-Robbers, Pirates, &c. Interspers'd with several Remarkable Trials Of the most Notorious Malefactors, at the Sessions-House in the Old-Baily* (London, &c. Oxford: Printed by R. Walker and W. Jackson, 1748).

MOBC88 James Montagu, *The Old Bailey Chronicle; Containing a circumstantial Account of the Lives, Trials, and Confessions of the most notorious Offenders who have suffered Death, and other exemplary Punishments, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, from the Commencement of the Year 1700, to the End of the Year 1788 .… Properly arranged from the Records of Court, by James Mountague, Esq. Of the Temple* (London : printed, by Authority, for S. Smith, Paternoster-Row; and sold by all Booksellers and News-carriers in Great Britain and Ireland, 1788).

MR79 *The Malefactor's Register; or New Newgate and Tyburn Calendar. Containing the Authentic Lives, Trials, Accounts of Executions, Dying Speeches, and other Curious Particulars, Relating to all the most notorious Violators of the Laws of their Country; Who have suffered Death, and other exemplary Punishments, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, from the Commencement of the Year 1700, to the Midsummer Sessions of next Year. ...* (London: Printed, by Authority, only for Alex. Hogg, No. 16, Pater-noster Row, 1779).

OBP *Old Bailey Proceedings.*

ONA *Ordinary of Newgate's Account.*

SIAL60 *A Select and Impartial Account of the Lives, Behaviour, and Dying Words, of the most remarkable Convicts, From the Year 1700, down to the present Time.* (London: Printed by J. Applebee, for J. Hodges, at the Looking-Glass on London-Bridge, and sold also by C. Corbett, at Addison's-Head, opposite St. Dunstan's-Church, in Fleet-Street, 1760).

SMLT26 Alexander Smith, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Together with the History and Lives of Modern Rogues, Several of 'em his Acquaintance, that have been executed before and since his Death, fo r the High-Way, Pad, Shop-Lifting, House-Breaking, Picking of Pockets, and impudent Robbing in the Street, and at Court* (London: Printed for Sam. Briscoe, at the Bell-Savage on Ludgate-Hill. and Sold By J. Jackson in the Pall Mall. J. Isted, J. Crockatt, and T. Worrall in Fleet-Street, 1726).

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ST35 *Select Trials for Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, And other Offences: At the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey. To which are Added, Genuine Accounts of the Lives, Behaviour, Confessions and Dying-Speeches of the most Eminent Convicts* (London: Printed for J. Wilford, behind the Chapter-House, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1735).

STMR64 *Select Trials for Murder, Robbery, Burglary, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Forgery, Pyracy, and other Offences and Misdemeanours, at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey, to which are added Genuine Accounts of the Lives, Exploits, Behaviour, Confessions, and Dying-Speeches, of the most notorious Convicts, from the year 1741 to the present year, 1764, inclusive; which completes the trials from the year 1720. In Four Volumes* (London : printed for J. Wilkie, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1764).

STSH42 *Select Trials at the Session-House in the Old Bailey, For Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, Bigamy, and other Offences. To which are added, Genuine Accounts of the Lives, Behaviours, Confessions and Dying Speeches of the most Eminent Convicts. In four Volumes. From the Year 1720 to this Time* (London: Printed by J. Applebee in Bolt-Court, Fleet-Street, For James Hodges, at the Looking-Glass, over-against St. Magnus-Church, London-Bridge, 1742).

TC68 *The Tyburn Chronicle: Or, Villainy Display'd in all its Branches. Containing an Authentic Account of the Lives, Adventures, Tryals, Executions, and last Dying Speeches of the most notorious Malefactors Of all Denominations, Who have suffered for Bigamy, Forgeries, Highway-Robberies, House-Breaking, Murders, Perjury, Piracy, Rapes, Riots, Sodomy, Starving, Treason, And other the most enormous Crimes.... From the Year 1700, to the present Time* (London: printed for J. Cooke, at Shakespear's - Head, in Pater-noster-Row, 1768).

VANM76 John Villette et al., *The Annals of Newgate; or, Malefactors Register. Containing a particular and circumstantial Account of the Lives, Transactions, and Trials of the most notorious Malefactors, who have suffered an ignominious Death for their Offences, viz. for Parricide, Murder, Treason, Robbery, Burglary, Piracy, Coining, Forgery, and Rapes.... By the Rev. Mr. Villette, Ordinary of Newgate, and others.* (London : printed for J. Wenman, No. 144, Fleet-Street, and sold by all other Booksellers, 1776).

I – Introduction

I.1 High and low

In December 1727, poet and playwright Richard Savage (1697/8-1743) stood trial in the Old Bailey for the murder of James Sinclair during a drunken brawl the previous November in Robinson's coffee-house, Charing-Cross. Savage and his drinking companions faced Justice Francis Page, a judge infamous for his severity. In spite of a lengthy, and unfortunately now lost, defense by the poet, Savage was condemned to hang and narrowly avoided execution thanks to a campaign of support orchestrated by Aaron Hill, which resulted in the granting of a free pardon.[1] This would not be the only time Savage, the 'volunteer laureate', dabbled in the rough-house lifestyle of the London lower-classes: in his biography of Savage, originally published in 1744 and later reprised in his *Lives of the Poets*, Samuel Johnson described his friend's casual homelessness, which forced him to sometimes take refuge “on a bulk, in a cellar, or in a glass-house among thieves and beggars”.[2]

The association of authors and criminals in accounts of Savage’s life was a familiar one. Hal Gladfelder, in his study of criminal literature, highlights the social and geographical closeness of literary production and criminality:

> Those authors who were not criminals themselves lived in such contagious proximity as to be more a part of the transgressive underworld than observers from outside it. Newgate, Smithfield, Moorfields and Bedlam – notorious locales of imprisonment, animal slaughter, Methodism, carnival, male hustling, burials and madness – were also sites of authorship and the book trade, especially the trade in broadsheets, cheap pamphlets, and secondhand books. The forms of popular and sensational literature were thus, even apart from their content, criminally tainted.[3]

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1 Freya Johnston, “Savage, Richard (1697/8–1743)” (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008).

2 Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: with Critical Observations on their Works* (Roger Lonsdale (ed). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), III:224.

3 Hal Gladfeler, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England. Beyond the Law* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins UP, 2001), 89).

Savage himself did not only circulate in theatrical and literary circles, but also in both lower and higher social milieus.[4] In addition to his alleged parentage as bastard child of Earl Rivers, he had a number of aristocratic supporters, and lived in Lord Tyrconnel's household for a time.[5] His life illustrates the cycle of affluence and poverty which characterised the literary class of Grub Street hacks, as well as that of many London criminals, thieves, and prostitutes.

His aristocratic and literary ambitions offset by poverty and illegality, Richard Savage operated in a social and cultural liminal space; so too, the texts about criminals occupy a liminal space between high and low culture. In spite of its formulaic, lowbrow and often uninspired characteristics, criminal literature could be, I argue, a prime site for literary experimentation: the treatment of the criminal within established genres provides opportunities for literary experimentation at the same time as it experiments with and adapts the reported 'facts' of the criminal's life. Although this thesis does not directly address the matter of criminal life-writing's place in the development of new literary forms in the eighteenth century, the influence of rogue narratives in the history of realist fiction is well-established. In providing a framework for the early novel in the works of Defoe in his fictional criminal lives (*Moll Flanders*, 1722, *Colonel Jack*, 1722 and, to an extent, *Roxana*, 1724) as well as subject matter for Henry Fielding's *History of the Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* and John Gay's incredibly popular *Beggar's Opera*, eighteenth-century criminal fictions and non-fictions have found their place in a range of literary studies. In *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700–1739*, John Richetti assesses the appeal of criminal narratives:

> Criminal fiction helps to perpetuate the criminal as a compelling and fascinating type-figure not simply because he and his environment satisfy a

4 Although his friendships were said to be rather short-lived, he befriended both Richard Steele and Alexander Pope, and was a member of the Hillarian circle.

5 Johnston, "Savage, Richard (1697/8–1743)".

> need for the recognizable rather than the ideal in literature, but also because his story and its significance evoke and exploit the deepest hopes and fears of his audience. Moreover, the 'realistic' world of underworld fiction and criminal journalism is, upon examination, an exotic place where mythological simplicities prevail. Criminal biography, in other words, is a species of fantasy which gives us access to part of the literary sub-culture of the early eighteenth century.[6]

Rogues' biographies straddled both the journalistic and the mythical. Although criminal narratives, whether in the form of cheap broadsheets and ballads, or of legalistic texts or expensive collections of rogues' lives, reached an impressively wide audience, their main consumers were in all probability to be found in the ever-expanding eighteenth-century middling-classes.[7] In addition to its exposition of eighteenth-century legal processes, criminal literature also prompted meditation on the nature of sin and morality, furnished titillating anecdotes and adventures, as well as guided its readers through the rites and criminal practices of a fabled London underworld.

Aside from its long-recognised place in the development of the early novel,[8] eighteenth-century criminal literature has attracted little scholarly attention. John Richetti's exploration of popular fiction and Hal Gladfelder's *Criminality and Narrative* both seek to link criminal narratives with more canonical works of fiction, in particular those of Defoe, Fielding and Richardson. Erin Mackie's more recent study explores criminal figures in the "making of the modern gentleman".[9] Only one literary monograph is devoted exclusively

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6 John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700–1739* (Oxford: Clarendon 1992), 25.

7 Based on the price of criminal biographies (usually six pence), Philip Rawlings asserts that, although "some members of the labouring classes may well have read, or listened to the reading of, criminal biographies … [and] there is plenty of evidence of the gentry's fascination with crime and its literature... it is likely that the core of the readership for crime literature came from the same broad social group as those who published it: the tradespeople, lawyers, clergy, doctors and so forth who composed the middling classes" *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices. Criminal biographies of the eighteenth century* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 4. Note however that a large number of cheaper, and often ephemeral, material about the lives of criminals was also available in the forms of ballads and last dying speeches for example, and that there is a body of (mainly journalistic) evidence indicating that the lower classes were eager consumers of criminal news and narratives.

8 Frank Chandler's *Literature of Roguery* (London: Archibald Constable, 1907)had already traced the link between criminal tales and the picaresque novel in the early twentieth century.

9 Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2009).

to eighteenth-century criminal biographies, Lincoln Faller's 1987 *Turned to Account. The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century England*.[10] Following a long exposition of different types of criminal narratives and their particular attractions for eighteenth-century readers, Faller devotes his short concluding chapter to the place of his subject matter in the development of the novel, in which he states that, "the most valuable way to relate criminal biography to the novel, ... is not in terms of its inherent forms or concerns, but rather in terms of the 'occasion' it made for the reading and writing of extended narratives about 'problematic lives'".[11] As such, the inclusion of criminal writings as a stage in the development of the realistic novel is generally not disputed; instead, it is their importance in that evolution that has divided scholars at least since Ian Watt pointed to the influence of 'rogue biographies' in the conception of *Moll Flanders* in his seminal *Rise of the Novel* (1957).[12]

Hal Gladfelder reacts against the quasi-mythical interpretation of criminal biography and its place in the development of the novel proposed by John Richetti's later expansion of Watt's insight. Exploring the attraction of criminal literature for eighteenth-century readers, he states:

> The pleasure of such narratives does not derive from their endlessly reiterated endorsement of the prevailing social and political orders, for this is an obligatory gesture, but from their smuggling of vividly concrete and sometimes problematic material into the traditional patterns and their consequent stirring up of the very subversive possibilities, the threats of disorder, they (presumably) set out to contain.[13]

This subversive aspect of criminal lives, more evident in lives of thieves, whose biographies were often focused less on penance and more on their trajectory to the

10 Lincoln Faller, *Turned to Account: The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987).
11 Faller, *Turned to Account*, 195.
12 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 106. In addition to the scholars mentioned above, see also Lennard Davis' *Factual Fictions : The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) and Michael McKeon's *Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins UP, 1988).
13 Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative*, 77.

gallows,[14] allows for greater freedom of both form and contents. With a subject matter by definition amoral, criminal tales offer a fertile ground for satire and experimentation, directed both at their lowly subject-matter and their wealthier counterparts. Trial reports and rogue biographies were of course not confined to accounts of plebeian criminals; indeed, well-known aristocratic felons attracted much interest, and the accounts of their lives tended to be longer and more detailed than that of petty lower-class thieves. However, criminal life-writing is especially rich in insight into the material lives of the urban poor and criminal communities which could also include the biographers themselves.

Furthermore, both criminal literature and the development of the novel take their place in the changing consumption patterns of eighteenth-century Britain. John Brewer – who links the development of a polite public sphere to the lack of a strong court culture and its opportunities for patronage and discusses the new phenomena of that sphere such as Heidegger's masquerades, Tyers' Vauxhall gardens or Lackington's boom in the second-hand book trade – comments on the sheer diversity of Augustan entertainments:

> These impresarios were responsible for the dissemination of new literary and aesthetic forms that emerged in the eighteenth century: the novel, the periodical essay, the conversation piece, the ballad opera, comic history painting and a variety of pastiche. They were agnostic when it came to the question of culture as a means of moral improvement. Though they were happy to support tragedy, epic poetry, and history painting, especially when these forms seemed particularly profitable, they did not hesitate to promote forms of entertainment which were neither morally elevated nor instructive. Their aim was to appeal to the appetite, to cater to changing taste, and to satisfy an audience eager to enjoy novelty and variety … at bottom their

14 For more on the importance of penance in eighteenth-century criminal biographies, see Lincoln Faller's *Turned to Account*. While biographies of murderers are very much concerned with their subject's morality and inner turmoils, thieves' personal characters rarely receive such interest. Faller, *Turned to Account*, 116. Biographies of murderers are centred around the criminals' immoral paths to the gallows, including their final confessions and acts of penitence while imprisoned or on the scaffold. Meanwhile, thieves' narratives instead focus on their subject's criminal exploits. Those condemned to death had access to the guidance of the Ordinary of Newgate, who often commented on their spiritual state in his *Accounts*. As the *Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts* were widely reproduced in the concluding, and often more formulaic, parts of other biographies, matters of repentance were nonetheless common (to an extent) in criminal life-writing.

> concern was to titillate their customers.[15]

He continues to describe a highly commercialised culture, featuring an "extraordinary variety of entertainments on offer and the apparent absence of discrimination between cultural forms that we would consider 'low,' popular or simply entertainment and those that we would view as edifying, improving, or highbrow", and which was easy to access as it was both cheap and available to all who could pay.[16] Criminal biographies take their place among other entertainments in this mercenary literary culture. Competing for readers with well-established sources like the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, published by the chaplain of Newgate prison after almost each execution day since the late seventeenth century,[17] the production of criminal biographies was a hurried affair whose commercial success relied on the short-lived fame of soon-to-be-hanged criminals.[18]

While most rogues did not warrant an abundance of different pamphlets and biographies, some particularly popular – or particularly frightful – criminals raised enough of an interest to provoke the production of a wealth of biographies, pamphlets, verses and engravings. According to Hal Gladfelder, the rapid popularity of such forms is tied to both technological and social developments: from the late seventeenth century,

> such genres as the crime report, anatomy of roguery, providence book, criminal biography, gallows speech, and trial came into a new commercial prominence, which owed something to the development of new printing technologies and mechanisms of book distribution in mid-century and something to an increasingly widespread cultural perception that criminality and the law were lenses that brought into focus much of what was most disturbing, and most exciting, about contemporary experience. Criminal narratives [sic] raise in its most aggravated form – at the point of rupture – the problem of the relation between the individual and a community which was

15 John Brewer, "'The most polite age and the most vicious': Attitudes towards culture as a commodity, 1600-1800" (Bermingham, Ann & John Brewer (eds). *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text.* London: Routledge, 1995), 346.

16 Brewer, "'The most polite age and the most vicious'", 348.

17 The first *Accounts* were published in 1676, and continued to appear regularly until the early 1770s; they contain the biographies of over two thousand executed criminals.

18 The results of such precipitation is illustrated in Hogarth's series of engravings, *Industry and Idleness*; the eleventh plate depicts Tom Idle, the idle apprentice turned highwayman, riding to Tyburn in the condemneds' cart, and features in its very centre a woman selling "The last dying speech & confession of —Tho. Idle.", even as he still has not reached the gallows.

> coming to define itself more and more through the discourses and institutions of secular law.[19]

Lincoln Faller identifies two overarching narratives in accounts of criminal lives: first, spiritual biography, which is mainly populated by murderers and follows their downfall into sin and eventual penitence at the gallows; and second, picaresque narratives, often focused on thieves and which feature three archetypal criminal roles – the hero, the brute, and the buffoon.[20] Although Faller's typology is more than adequate in its representation of the formulaic aspects of biographies of rogues, it fails to take into account the diversity of forms and content identifiable in the full range of criminal life-writing. While the bulk of the available material on eighteenth-century criminals consists of legal texts such as the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts*, and of biographies such as those Lincoln Faller examines, other types of texts about criminal lives have not only survived, but have also been incorporated in different iterations of these biographies. Thus, the accounts of the lives of criminals in collections such as Captain Mackdonald's G*eneral History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Pirates, Street-Robbers, and Thief-Takers* (1758) or the anonymous *Tyburn chronicle: or, Villainy Display'd in All its Branches* (1768) are based on a multitude of texts, including competing biographies, ballads and pamphlets, and even recycled material from popular fictional or forgotten biographical texts. Pieced together with little attention to consistency, these biographies become a mosaic of legalese, newspaper articles, possibly accurate and factual source material, as well as fanciful, if not downright preposterous, tales. As such, eighteenth-century criminal literature as a whole resists clear-cut typological divisions: Hal Gladfelder thus divides criminal literature into a web of distinct, but closely interconnected genres, which I explore under the umbrella term

19 Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative*, 5.

20 While such generic archetypes do indeed appear in much of criminal literature, their very malleability, in Faller's own analysis, "illustrate yet another way in which criminals tend to stand beyond easy categorization." Faller, *Turned to Account,* 146.

of life-writing. Although most of the sources used in this thesis are indeed biographies, a focus on the wider genre of life-writing, which includes private and public letters, news reports, satire, as well as fiction elaborating on the life of criminals, provides a much more thorough insight into the criminals' intricate literary afterlife. As criminal biographers unabashedly borrow, reproduce, and adapt previous texts, life accounts of criminals function at the intersection of a very diverse body of genres. While the demarcation between official texts such as the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and fictionalised accounts of criminal lives is clear, together they take part in the shaping of the figure of the rogue, as evidenced by the rather unsubtle way in which information from both sets of sources is hacked and pasted together in later collections of criminal lives.

Both pseudo-factual and fictionalised criminal life-writing offer rich sources on the eighteenth-century perceptions of the urban poor. Although they are highly unreliable as historical sources, these texts not only uncover an almost-mythical criminal underworld, but also expose the uneasy relationship between London polite and impolite society, as well as contemporary debates about property and ownership, 'true' gentility, corruption, and the legal system as a whole. For Gladfelder, summarising the evolution of the printed trial as a narrative which had adopted a genre-specific structure by the eighteenth century,

> published lives were coming to be recognized as a part of a whole criminal *system*, complicitous with the work of judges and courts both in determining guilt and in defining the nature and extent of criminality but often impending the verdicts and pretensions of the governing orders … Because of the criminal law's disproportionate concern with the propertyless, trial reports describe the material conditions and everyday life of the urban poor especially, with a fullness of detail available in no other form of writing until Defoe fabricated the autobiographies of Colonel Jack and Moll Flanders in the 1720s.[21]

Criminal narratives therefore provide an unprecedented insight into (sometimes mythical) communities often ignored by more highbrow literature. Characterised by their subject's

21 Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative*, 57-67.

rejection of social or legal norms, they were consumed by more affluent readers than those from the world the lives depicted, readers who were doubtless seeking insight into threatening, 'other' social classes. Criminals and their stories thus expose not only legal, social and moral norms and rebellions, but also uneasy definitions of property (whether material, physical or literary) and community. The thieves' own hybridity is translated in the genres adopted by their biographers, ranging from poorly-written journalistic prose, more or less edifying sermons, to a plethora of literary forms such as plays or even epistolary fiction. The thieves' dangerous social mobility is echoed in the life-writing dedicated to them, as their lives also become sites for highbrow satire in mock-heroic form.

In spite of its often decried literary quality (rogues' biographies were, after all, considered the realm of penny-pinching Grub Street hacks, who were themselves often compared to pickpockets), criminal life-writing plays a definite role in the development of realist literature. Mostly anonymous and ephemeral, these narratives of subversion and revolt are a ground for literary experimentation, providing easy satire and cheap thrills, along with a recognisable, yet malleable, structure which contained and limited their subversive potential. Their lowly subject matters allow for more freedom in the writing of 'lives', and as such participate in the development of biography as a genre. Moreover, eighteenth-century criminal biographies touch upon burning contemporaneous issues such as literary property, at a time when copyright law was undergoing some of its most important changes. Hal Gladfelder hence argues, in relating Godwin's novel, *Caleb Williams* (1794), to the genre of criminal biography, in particular accounts of one of the most famous eighteenth-century criminals, John Sheppard, that

> Both Caleb [Williams] and Sheppard inhabit a world caught up in the lure and threat of the criminal; both feel the discrepancy between their experience and its representations, a discrepancy that ultimately impels them to become authors of true histories of themselves, claiming the sole right – a right of

> property over the self and its stories – to the narratives of their own lives.[22]

Both Caleb and the escapist John Sheppard react to inaccurate accounts of their lives, allegedly (in the case of Sheppard)[23] by penning or selling their own biography. By declaring themselves as the only legitimate owner of their life stories, Caleb and John add an additional layer to the already complex relations between author and publisher. The 1710 statute of Anne divested publishers from copyright and granted authors the ownership of their texts for fourteen years. Meanwhile, textual property was under fiery debate as the Stationers' Company attempted to protect its monopoly. Lives of thieves were a suitable platform for such debates, as their focus on property is not limited to tangible items, but is instead extended to individuals' rights to their own life story and body. By telling their lives on the scaffold, or investing specific printers or writers with their authority to publish their biography even as their own body has become a commodity for executioner and surgeons alike, criminals appear to claim ownership of their stories. The author then disappears, in favour of claims to factuality as the narrative is advertised as 'taken from the criminal's own mouth'. Additionally, the tough competition between different biographies of the same felons, as well as their focus on issues of property, naturally invites disputes on textual ownership and piracy. The criminal can thus become the embodiment of what David Brewer identifies as textual commons, canonical characters whose literary afterlife is not exclusive to their original authors and are used and reused in other narratives and genres.[24] Indeed, the story of the criminal is not only kept alive through revamped biographies, but can also, in the case of more famous criminals, become

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22 Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative*, xi.

23 A famed criminal and escapist, Sheppard is the subject of a large number of biographies, one of which was written in the first person and was later attributed to Daniel Defoe. While this claim is difficult to prove, Sheppard did endow this particular narrative with special authority by handing it to the printer John Applebee or one of his associates from the gallows. This event was described in several newspapers reports, which were followed by an advertisement directing potential buyers to the relevant booksellers.

24 David A. Brewer, *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 13.

the subject of theatrical entertainment as well as fiction.[25]

I.2 Crime, consumption and thing-theory

Criminal life-writing, and especially biographies of thieves, is closely concerned with issues of ownership. Through the often violent destruction of the link between objects and their subjects which lies at the core of their subject matter, criminal narratives address issues of property and consumption. However, they also question the very concept of ownership and belonging, expanded beyond objects to include lives and bodies. In this, they mirror the concerns surrounding changing patterns of production and consumption in the eighteenth century. From narratives following the events leading to the theft of a lock of hair in Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1712/1714) to those of the tribulations of a guinea at the hands of different owners in Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal* (1760-5), objects and their relation with (owning) subjects populate much of eighteenth-century literature. This new attention to the object is often seen as a symptom of the redefinition of the relationship between consumers and objects in a culture of growing trade and luxury.

Since Bill Brown's 2001 call for a new focus on things,[26] scholars such as Jonathan Lamb, Barbara Benedict, and Mark Blackwell have been keen to explore the function of things in eighteenth-century literature and its depiction of new modes of consumption.[27]

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25 The most famous criminals, such as John Sheppard and Dick Turpin, were also revived in the nineteenth-century through William H. Ainsworth's incredibly successful and heavily fictionalised historical novels. As such, famous eighteenth-century criminals fit perfectly into David Brewer's concepts, which describe eighteenth-century texts as an inchoate type of property, not necessarily under strict authorial control and canonical characters such as Falstaff as becoming available for further adventures. Brewer, *The Afterlife of Character*, 23. Famous criminals can therefore become shorthand for particular sets of character traits (for example, Sheppard as the young, noble and skillful thief, and his nemesis Wild as corrupt, treacherous and cowardly).

26 Brown draws on the investigation of the perceiving subject's access to the 'unmediated' and the 'real' by scholars such as Jacques Lacan, Martin Heidegger or Bruno Latour, as well as French philosopher Michel Serres' work on self, objects and identity to advocate for thing theory in *Critical Enquiry,* for which he acted as guest editor. Bill Brown (ed), *Critical Enquiry* 28:1 (Autumn 2001). This volume was republished three years later, with four additional papers. Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press), 2004.

27 See for example Jonathan Lamb's *The Things Things say* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011); Barbara Benedict's "Encounters with the Object: Advertisements, Time, and Literary Discourse in the Early Eighteenth-Century Thing-Poem" (*The Secret Life of Things : Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in*

Brown follows in the footsteps of anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai, whose work on material culture shaped and defined objects and things as crucial aspects of social experiences. For Appadurai, "even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (original emphasis).[28] Things and their movement are therefore an inherent and defining facet of human relationships and communities; as such, the new profusion of material things and opportunities for consumption which arises during the eighteenth century powerfully affects social relations and norms.

For Bill Brown, objects become things when their function fails: "the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation."[29] This breaking down of the privileged relationship between subjects and objects drives things to the margins of comprehension. Thus John Plotz, in his appraisal of thing theory, calls these things "limit cases at which our ordinary categories for classifying signs and substances, meaning and materiality, appear to break down".[30] Stripped of their signifiers, things escape categorisation and occupy a liminal space. An additional layer of analysis is conveyed by the notion of quasi-objects, first theorised by French philosopher Michel Serres in his book *Le Parasite*, and now an important aspect of actor-network theory. For Serres, the quasi-object (such as a ball in a game) only attains its value and function when in use within a network; it transiently carves the thinking subject out of the

Eighteenth-Century England. Ed. Mark Blackwell. Lewisburg : Bucknell UP, 2007) 19-42; Lynn Festa's "Crusoe's Island of Misfit Things" (*The Eighteenth Century* 52:3/4, Fall/Winter 2011), 443-471, and "Person, Animal, Thing: The 1796 Dog Tax and the Right to Superfluous Things" (*Eighteenth-Century Life* 33:2,2009), 1-44; or Mark Blackwell's "Hackwork: It-Narratives and Iterations." (*The Secret Life of Things : Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England.* Ed. Mark Blackwell. Lewisburg : Bucknell UP, 2007), 187-217.

28 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value" (*The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 5.

29 Brown, *Critical Enquiry*, 4.

30 John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A look at Thing Theory" (*Criticism* 47:1 [Winter 2005]), 110.

indistinguishable collective, and in its movement 'subjectifies' the human subjects themselves.[31]

In spite of its preoccupation with the movement and significance of objects and things, criminal life-writing, and especially literature about thieves, has received relatively scant attention from material culture and thing-theory scholars. They have mainly been explored in historical studies focused on judicial processes and patterns of criminality,[32] or in literary studies such as those of Lincoln Faller or Hal Gladfelder discussed above. The relevance of Brown's account of the thing to criminal life-writing is evident in that through theft the object is separated from its owning subject. Criminal life-writing exemplifies the eighteenth century complex, and often uneasy, relationship between individuals and objects — indeed, the criminal himself comes to embody the status of things, circulating at the margin of society. This thesis seeks to break new ground by turning critical attention to the life of objects in accounts of criminals of the eighteenth century.

Bill Brown reposes the question behind the work of the French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour, one of the founders of actor-network theory in which material objects and human subjects are constructed as equal parts of social networks: "if it isn't the othering of people that the thingness of things disclose?"[33] Latour echoes a concern that is particularly relevant to eighteenth-century Britain, in which (as we will see) the demarcation between things, objects and subjects was at best hazy, at worst deeply problematic. Ileana Baird, in her introduction to *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Cultur*e (2014), remarks that "all these approaches challenge the clear-cut boundaries between the object and the subject by

31 Michel Serres, *Le Parasite* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1980), 303-306.

32 See for example J.M. Beattie's *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) and *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750 : Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror (*Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), Vic Gatrell's *The Hanging Tree : Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), Douglas Hay (et alii)'s *Albion's Fatal Tree : Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*. (London: Allen Lane, 1975) or Peter Linebaugh's *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century.* (London: Verso, 2003 [1991]).

33 Brown, *Things*, 12.

insisting on the dehumanizing effect of things when mass-produced in the form of commodities, or when allowed to replicate human processes and behaviors".[34] Wolfram Schmidgen, in his study of real property and fiction, comments on eighteenth-century perceptions of objects: "communities of persons and things in eighteenth-century Britain are on the whole characterized by permeable boundaries, by a sense of open traffic across human and material zones. Only very gradually, and against considerable resistance, are these boundaries delineated".[35] Objects are also potent signifiers: dress, for example, is a very material (and highly unreliable) representation not only of rank but also of gentility and social belonging, and participates in processes of self-expression and -identification.[36] Meanwhile, portable items such as account and pocket books played a crucial part in daily business transactions for people of all ranks. The separation between human subjects and material objects and things in the eighteenth-century is therefore not clear-cut. Indeed, the dramatic growth of production, exchange and consumption in the British market led to legal and social questioning on the grounds of British exceptionalism: "the great circulation of new and valuable commodities made any comparison of England's laws with those of other states unsound" according to contemporaries.[37]

The figure of the thief becomes particularly problematic – and enlightening – in this context. As thieves and their booty circulate across social, commercial and legal boundaries, they manipulate, and hence question, the norms separating each space. Both

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34 Ileana Baird, "Introduction: Peregrine Things: Rethinking the Global in Eighteenth-Century Studies" (*Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture*. Ed. Baird and Christina Ionescu. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 4.

35 Wolfram Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 1.

36 In their discussion of the shopping scene in *Evelina*, Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan assert that "Material artifacts, *Evelina* reminds us, not only shape bodies and perceptions, but allow their possessors to establish their place in society". (Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, eds, *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1; an impoverished Richard Savage was thus famously unable to raise funds to return to London from Bristol as "the decay of his clothes made it no longer consistent with [his supporters'] vanity to admit him to their tables, or to associate with him in publick places." Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets,* III: 291.

37 Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 20.

object and criminals can be made unrecognisable, as plate is melted down, monograms unpicked, and lace cut and sold, while the thieves themselves use disguise not only to escape justice, but also to gain access to shops, assemblies, and places of business. When booty is moved through the criminal act of theft, it becomes a quasi-object defining the human subjects involved in its movement – thief and victim, who, according to Jonathan Lamb, develop and uneasy familiarity centred around the lost thing, and engage in an illegal transaction which can equally destroy or restore ownership.[38] The stolen thing is itself also stripped of its characteristics as an object until a legitimate, and sometimes new, owning subject is found either through judicial or commercial processes, its worth often defined not through its market value, but "priced [through] the aesthetics of ownership, … [as] it was the residue of propriety in the thing, that quality that made it – or had made it – peculiarly the owner's own, which was being negotiated".[39]

The illegal circulation of objects thus paints a complex map of eighteenth-century interpersonal, individual and systemic relations, as ownership represents an integral part of self definition. For Julie Park, "the centrality of the object – as manifested in the material goods themselves; the idealized and ideologically shaped models of the self, and most generally, the perception of a thing – created a rich and exotic idiom for selfhood."[40] In his discussion of Locke and Hobbes' differing views of property, Jonathan Lamb thus remarks that they

> agree that justice is a matter of an individual's relation to things … The issue is not one of fairness but of security of possession: being sure of owning a thing. Once property is guaranteed, then a sequence is formed that can be delivered as an account. Each sees an intimate connection between possessing and telling things. A self preserved by what is his very own can begin a narrative of its life.[41]

38 Jonathan Lamb, "The Crying of Lost Things" (*ELH* 71:4, Winter 2004), 953.
39 Lamb, "The Crying of Lost Things", 952.
40 Julie Park, *The Self and It. Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford UP: Stanford, 2010), xiii.
41 Lamb, *The Things Things say*, 10.

Lamb here links secure ownership not simply to self-identification, but also to self-preservation through narrative, as 'owning' and 'telling' become intimately related. Eighteenth-century life-writing, whether based on the lives of real individuals or entirely fabricated, hence relies heavily on the material world, as the narrative is driven by the loss and gain of significant objects. The most extreme examples of such object-oriented lives are it-narratives, following the tribulations of a sentient object from owner to owner. These objects generally reflect on their lives once they have been taken out of circulation, have become static and unused. According to Mark Blackwell and Liz Bellamy, it-narratives question "where human personhood ends and alienable property begins", significant "to an eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century world haunted … by the imposition of capital punishment for property crimes [and] by legal wrangling over copyright".[42] The power of sentient things blurs the boundaries between owning subjects and their possessions, as bodies become commodities through execution and dissection, and texts become the immaterial property of their authors. For Barbara Benedict, "the representation of things ... allows eighteenth-century writers to explore the relationship between materiality and morality, form and formlessness, body and soul, and to express anxiety about unseen powers that control human beings". These powers can reside in things themselves: "in *Moll Flanders* things possess a devilish power. They overtake Moll's agency and pull her will-lessly into action".[43] Things can reverse the traditional dynamic between active subjects and passive objects, as individuals are stripped of their agency, and manipulated into helpless objects under the power of inanimate things.

Criminals fit neatly into this exploration of the limits between objects and individuals. Defined by their refusal – or inability – to conform with socially-defined acceptable behaviours and occupation, thieves inhabit the same liminal space as things, at

42 Mark Blackwell and Liz Bellamy, eds. *British It-Narratives, 1750-1830* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), I:viii. Both scholars also link it-narratives with the development of the early novel.

43 Benedict, "Encounters with the Object", 20 & 25.

once powerful and powerless, objects and subjects. Thus Ian Bell defines the function of crime and crime literature:

> The socially-defined category of crime and its representation by authors is designed to make social experience comprehensible, albeit in different ways in different texts, to give meaning to and provide possibly contending explanations for the disconcerting bustle and apparent chaos of urban life.[44]

Criminal and object literatures alike act as means of exploring new social practices, shaped by the surge of population as well as production and consumption which defines eighteenth-century London. Although eighteenth-century studies have moved away from a monolithic perception of a Harbermasian polite public sphere by exploring, for example, the role of women in the consumption and creation of culture and artifacts,[45] the violent dissolution and recreation of the bound between consumer and objects, as well as plebeian (and often illegal) modes of consumption have received scant attention. Criminal life-writing provides a point of entry into the lives of a population often difficult to observe. The movements of both objects and thieves paint the picture of a socially mobile criminal class, keen to reproduce valued aspects of upper-class culture but also seeking to define their own social norms and behaviours. According to Ann Bermingham,

> rather than seeing class and identity as stable and homogeneous we need to see them as mobile, fragmented, and inventive. We need to explore the way in which individuals appropriate cultural forms to their own individual ends, as tools to construct social selves; at times to comply with and at other times to resist institutional and social coercions.[46]

The criminals who inhabit the narratives discussed in each of my chapters attempt to transform their environment through the objects around them, even as they are themselves

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44 Ian Bell, *Literature and Crime in Augustan England* (London: Routledge, 1991), 55.

45 Referring to his"What is enlightenment?" piece (1984), Ann Bermingham opposes Foucault's definition of the self to Habermas' depiction of the rise of the bourgeois public sphere: "Foucault's 'hermeneutics of the self' consists in a play of social codes, discourses, and systems of knowledge. The subject does not exist prior to culture and cannot be envisioned outside the processes of its own cultural becoming. Cut loose from bourgeois individualism which assumed a 'normative' subject who was white, male and middle-class, Foucault's notion of the subject coincide with contemporary feminist and multicultural explorations of identity as constructed through the play of social and cultural differences." Ann Bermingham, "Introduction" (Bermingham, Ann & John Brewer (eds). *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text.* London: Routledge, 1995), 11.

46 Bermingham, "Introduction", 14.

contained and commercialised in texts exposing – and containing – the titillating dangers of criminal underworlds. Whether adopting upper-class sartorial codes, crafting their own genteel accessories, using the objects of incarceration in order to make their escape, or redefining the link between thief and victim, legality and criminality, the thieves attempt to grasp and maintain control through the material world, and are defined by their relationship with meaningful items. Their identity is shaped, gained and lost depending on their mastery over the material world, as the boundaries between classes become not only more and more permeable, but are also materially defined. Accounts of the lives of thieves join anxieties about urban violence to both person and property with issues of class mobility and ambition, sin and morality, and unrestrained consumption. As both thieves and victims struggle to maintain control over stolen objects, the criminals take on the status of property, as lucrative exhibits for their jailors, warnings to their confederates for the judicial system, objects of study for anatomist, or profitable subject-matter for writers and printers alike. As they themselves become belongings, the nature of their own belonging to a community whose members are defined by a shared relationship with illicit objects is called into question. Through life-writing, the thief himself becomes object, and even thing.

I.3 Thieves, objects and the law

The eighteenth century's concern with issues of property and consumption is also palpable in its changing legal landscape. The changing consumption patterns which affected both consumers and producers led to new attitudes towards chattels as well as the laws which direct them. Eighteenth-century criminal law is now famed for its so-called 'Bloody Code', a collection of new legal statutes which quadrupled the number of crimes punishable by death. Most of these capital offences dealt with property crimes: Douglas

Hay notes that "... the number of capital statutes grew from about 50 to over 200 between the years 1688 and 1820. Almost all of them concerned offences against property".[47] This sharp increase was allegedly accompanied by a crime wave at the beginning of the eighteenth century. While it is difficult to confirm or affirm the grounds of such alarm, Ian Bell links this anxiety to new reporting methods, which highlighted the dangers of urban crime: "The widespread belief in the contemporary growth of crime was created at least as much by developments in the reporting of crime and in imaginative invigorations of the criminal, as by any actual and detectable changes in the behaviour and practices of law-breakers".[48] The continuing spread of rogue biographies, along with more numerous newspaper reports on recent crime, fed into contemporary fears of criminality. J.M. Beattie agrees with Bell's assessment, noting that "the regular reports of violent offences tried at the Old Bailey at the very least sustained the sense of alarm in the capital". For Beattie, changes in the criminal narrative from picaresque tales to more realistic accounts of criminal activity also contributed to this panicked response: "brief as they were, the accounts of the Old Bailey trials and of the lives of the condemned marked a shift in crime publishing from heavily fictionalized tales of the daring pranks of highwaymen intended as entertainment to something more approaching a source of public information".[49]

One of the most populous cities in Europe,[50] London was a particularly fertile ground for criminal behaviours. Its judicial system was also different from other areas, as criminal offences such as theft or murder had their dedicated court at the Old Bailey, which was convened much more often that the assizes. The changing patterns of crime identifiable in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* find their basis in the often precarious situation of the London working class: bad harvests, continual immigration, as well as war and peace all influenced

47 Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 18.
48 Bell, *Literature and Crime*, 57.
49 Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London*, 21 & 3.
50 The population of London had grown to "close to half a million by the end of the seventeenth century". Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London*, 7.

the amount of property crime perpetrated in the capital.[51] As prices rose and employment opportunities became scarce, crime rates soared. However, most petty thefts did not make it to the Old Bailey court: instead, magistrates often chose to send these offenders to Bridewell prison, or, provided the goods were returned to the victim, let them go with a warning. In the absence of a policing system, thief-takers such as Jonathan Wild specialised in reuniting goods with their legitimate owners, in a transaction which often saw the victim pay a fee to both thief-taker and thief, and could be carried altogether independently from the courts. The majority of cases that did make it to trial featured crimes that qualified for a capital sentence if the accused was to be found guilty.[52]

Nonetheless, the eighteenth century is also considered as a defining moment in the development of 'modern' approaches towards crime and justice. The mid-century saw the first steps towards centralised policing with the Fielding magistrates' bow street runners. Beattie argues in *Crime and the Courts* (1986) that, in addition to the more easily identifiable push towards judicial reform of the second half of the century, fundamental changes also took place during the first half, such as the development of non-capital punishments like transportation, or lawyer counsel for the accused. Attitudes towards crime also shifted from an individual to a social perspective at the turn of the century. Beattie notes that

> there was a common perception in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that crime was a serious problem. The offences that caused the sharpest anxieties and triggered the strongest responses were those that threatened individual victims in their person or property... Such offences were widely viewed as transgressions of the moral order … But for some time by the late seventeenth century crime had also been coming to be seen not only as a collection of individual actions, but as a social pathology, or at least

51 Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London*, 41-42. Since the publication of the influential, if criticised, *Albion's Fatal Tree. Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* in 1975 by Douglas Hay, in association with Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, historians of criminality and legal system have focused on the social and class dimensions of crime and prosecution in eighteenth-century Britain.

52 Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London*, 19.

a social problem.[53]

Rogue biographies are mainly focused on these particularly disturbing crimes. Property crime was particularly problematic, and the Bloody Code, with its plethora of new capital offences, served as a strong warning meant to discourage potential thieves of all ilks. This severity parallels the changes in patterns of consumption and production, a shift which was also apparent to eighteenth-century thinkers such as William Blackstone.

Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, published between 1765 and 1769, attempts not only to present, but also justify the development of the English legal system. An incredibly successful financial venture, the treatise was based upon Blackstone's series of law lectures in Oxford, and its publication was allegedly motivated, perhaps fittingly, in part by the circulation of imperfect and pirated copies of his lectures: "For the truth is, that the present publication is as much the effect of necessity, as it is of choice... copies [of the notes taken by students] have been multiplied, in their nature imperfect, if not erroneous; some of which have fallen into mercenary hands, and become the object of clandestine sale".[54] The *Commentaries* are divided into four volumes, on the "rights of persons", the "rights of things", "private wrongs" and "public wrongs". The first volume thus deals with the relationship between people, whether king and aristocracy, master and servant, or husband and wives, while the second volume is focused on property, whether real or chattels. Although less enthusiastic in his discussion of criminal law, Blackstone firmly bases his analysis of English law on principles of natural law coupled with English specificity.

Blackstone begins his volume on the "rights of things" by forcefully underlining the

53 Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London*, 1.

54 William Blackstone, "Preface", *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford: Printed at the Clarendon Press, 1765-1769), I:iii-iv. This passage may be referring to threats of a pirate Dublin edition. Although editions of his previous lectures had been published (*An Analysis of the Laws of England*, 1756, covered some of his private lectures, whereas his inaugural lecture as the first Vinerian professor of law was published in *A discourse on the Study of the Law*, 1758), those he gave as part of his professorship were circulated through copies of student notes. Wilfrid Prest, *William Blackstone: Law and Letters in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 217.

importance of property:

> There is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination, and engages the affections of mankind, as the right of property; or that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe.[55]

Property, defined as the adversarial right of ownership exerted by one individual over inanimate objects, features prominently in Blackstone's hierarchy of rights. However, this right does not originate in principles of natural law: instead, Blackstone describes a natural state during which the *right* of possession only lasted as long as the *act* of possession. The object only belongs to the subject for as long as he or she is using it, in a relationship akin to the notion of quasi-objects as theorised by Michel Serres. Blackstone goes on to describe a more sophisticated stage during which it became necessary to "appropriate to individuals not the immediate *use* only, but the very *substance* of the thing to be used".[56] This change is linked directly with the needs of a consumption society, in which tenuous and time-limited property would discourage production. Although the volume itself is very much concerned with real property, or land, it concludes its exploration of ownership with a discussion of 'things personal', that is, movable property, or 'chattels personal'. Blackstone himself recognises the changes in the relationship between persons and things brought about by changing patterns of production and consumption:

> But of later years, since the introduction and extension of trade and commerce, which are entirely occupied in this species of property [things personal], and have greatly augmented it's [*sic*] quantity and of course it's [*sic*] value, we have learned to conceive different ideas of it. Our courts now regard a man's personalty[57] in a light nearly, if not quite, equal to his realty.[58]

Moveable property thus attained a new status, inching ever closer to that of realty. This increasing value of chattels parallels the expansion of the Bloody Code, which

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55 Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England,* II:2.
56 Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England,* II:3 & II:4.
57 "Personal goods or estate; ... personal belongings". Its corollary, 'realty', refers to real property, or real estate (*OED*).
58 Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England,* II:385.

specifically targeted crimes against property. The growing anxiety which surrounded urban crime was not simply concerned with protecting property; instead, it identified new modes of consumption as the root of lower class misconduct. According to J.M. Beattie:

> to the propertied house-holders of the city, the problem of crime was a problem wilfully produced by the attitudes and behaviour of the poorer members of the working population because of their attachment to the developing pleasures and opportunities for consumption offered by the metropolis.[59]

The increase of goods did not just offer new temptations to potential thieves; by their very availability, these objects opened dangerous precedents for the poor, keen to mimic their superiors and consume inadequately. The Bloody Code and its myriad of new capital offences thus attempt to function as a foil to this world of new thieving opportunities.

However, this image of an inclement and increasingly blood-thirsty legal system is tempered by the application of these new laws. While the number of capital offences soared, that of executions decreased. Vic Gattrell explains that:

> Execution rates declined in the second third of the seventeenth century as transportation to the American colonies absorbed many who would once have hanged; and political stability kept hanging rates stable across the next half century … there had been a mere 281 London hangings between 1701 and 1750; there were nearly five times as many between 1751 and 1800.[60]

Douglas Hay also notes the discrepancy between the number of convictions for theft, a capital offence, and the relative stability of the number of hangings, which could be explained by the increased use of royal pardons.[61] As such, while the eighteenth century English law appears incredibly severe, it is tempered in its application by processes such as legal pardons, underestimation of the value of the stolen goods, and judges' discretion.

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59 Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London*, 72.

60 Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, 7. Note that Douglas Hay, discussing the advent of the Bloody Code some twenty years prior, remarks that “in spite of the growth in trade and population, the increasing number of convictions for theft, and the continual creation of new capital statutes throughout the eighteenth century, the number of executions remained relatively stable, especially after 1750”. While Hay includes the county assizes in his analysis, he also states that “although it is asserted that after 1750 a constantly declining proportion of death sentence was actually carried out, this is only true in London. In the home counties the proportion of condemned who were executed remained fairly steady over the same period”. Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 22 & 57. Gatrell is here in direct opposition with previous scholarship.

61 Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 2.

Moreover, reluctance to create a centralised police force, which made arrest and conviction difficult to attain, and resulted in unsatisfactory secondary punishments (such as transportation, from which many a felon returned to their trade after their seven years in the colonies) meant that many criminals went unpunished. On the other hand, legal processes took on a more solemn aspect: Hay thus describes the quasi-religiousness of judicial rituals, with the judge as priest.[62]

Although there was a number of available capital punishments (female coiners were strangled and burnt, and the pillory could turn into more than painful humiliation depending on the violence of the crowd), offences such as theft and murder were punished by hanging. The triple tree of Tyburn, which could accommodate nine simultaneous executions, offered a powerful reminder of the danger of lawlessness. However, public executions were not simply a demonstration of state power. Instead, they could become carnivalesque affairs, providing entertainment as well as an additional day off for the capital's young apprentices.[63] The ride from Newgate to Tyburn gave the condemned one last public appearance following the monetisation of their fame in Newgate prison itself. While narratives of repentance dominated the gallow speeches, some criminals expressed their plebeian gentility by 'dying well',[64] while others stopped in ale-houses on their way to the gallows. Moreover, the Tyburn crowd was a well-known site of pickpocketry and riots, as thieves operated even as their confederates were hanging for their crimes, and the mob sometimes displayed its destructive powers against surgeons and executioners. In his discussion of hanging as a demonstration of state sovereignty, Peter Linebaugh argues that:

> just as each hanging renewed the power of sovereignty, so each hanging

62 Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 29-30.

63 Apprentices as a group were considered very vulnerable to the temptations of criminality; as such, the 'bad apprentice' narrative, in which a young man is lured into crime by gambling, drinking and women of bad reputation was a popular one (see for example the biographies of John Sheppard, or Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* series of engravings).

64 See Andrea McKenzie's “Martyrs in Low Life? Dying 'Game' in Augustan England.” (*The Journal of British Studies* 42 [April 2003]), 167-205.

> repeated the lesson: 'Respect Private Property' … While this view contains an important truth, it is an oversimplified one, for the population was not so stupid that it needed so many 'examples' to teach the same lesson. Actually, the lesson changed because the meaning of 'property' changed...As a result ... questions of making and questions of getting were continually being raised and tested, requiring ever fresh lessons from the 'triple tree'.[65]

The growth of trade and consumption culture in the eighteenth century triggered far-reaching changes in criminal, judicial and punitive behaviours. Providing ever-increasing material temptations and opportunities, the rise of 'things personal' indicates a radical change in eighteenth-century society, as social mobility became more and more attainable through commercial ventures in London. These new business opportunities included arts and entertainment venues, open to all who could pay, and combined patronage from polite and fashionable circles with opportunities for disruptive conducts such as theft, prostitution and sexual intrigue. As even punitive rituals are turned into riotous entertainment, and as young immigrants from the country flocked to the capital in search of employment, moral anxieties crystallised around issues of unchecked consumption and idleness. Criminal biographies trace the slow descent into illegality of young members of the working classes, spurred on by visit to ale-houses, Sabbath-breaking, and association with loose women. Although criminal biographies provide familiar admonition and warnings to their readers, they also relish in the risqué adventures of their heroes, and reproduce the Tyburn dichotomy of warning and carnival.

This thesis seeks to explore how the representation of thieves in eighteenth-century life-writing is shaped by their relationship with objects, and shaped differently according to the nature of those objects. It is composed of two main parts. The first focuses on the London criminal circles of the beginning of the century, while the second is centred on socially and geographically mobile highwaymen figures. While the London criminal

65 Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, xxii-xxiii.

circles might be seen as forming parallel dysfunctional underworld societies, highwaymen are more often treated as solitary itinerants at most in social relationship with an accomplice or a horse. Circulating, like the booty they fence, at the margins of legality and social structures, the thieves depend on their mastery of objects and their significations to succeed, whether in making a profit or evading arrest and execution. In accounts of their lives, these objects become animated and acquire a life of their own, dominating the thief's narrative and representation, turned into things, or manipulated into new functions. The prevalence of objects as drivers of narrative affects every aspects of the criminal's life, not only diverting or impeding his ownership of property, but dictating in a more metaphysical sense the nature of the thief's belonging to a community whose members are defined by their shared relationship with objects not their own.

These belongings, which can be carried, and carried away by the thief, are diverse. Clothing figures prominently in these narratives; dress is, after all, the most portable of belongings, and, according to John Styles, often represents the single most expensive personal belonging for members of the lower classes.[66] But others items populate the world of the thief, with not only accessories such as books, weapons and furniture, but also manacles, bars, chains or rope. I do not attempt to reconstruct the real lives of these criminals from life-writing about them – indeed, I argue against such an endeavour as, although eighteenth-century criminal narratives originated in journalistic and legal reports, their mosaic nature places them in the realm of fiction, albeit fiction inspired by real-life individuals. Trial reports, newspaper articles and early biographies all engage in variations on a common theme and genre, as the figure of the thief serves to explore issues of sin, legal processes, social ambition, belonging and control. Reflecting anxieties surrounding consumption and property, eighteenth-century criminal life-writing is driven by the thief's

66 John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 303. Because of its potential for subversion, dress figures prominently throughout the thesis.

relationship with objects, dominating his narrative and representation. The prevalence of objects as drivers of narrative affect every aspects of the criminal's life, not only diverting or impeding his ownership of property, but also dictating the nature of the thief's belonging to a fabled criminal community, the London underworld.

I.4 Structure

Both parts are composed of three chapters, each focused on one particular criminal, in chronological order of execution date.[67] The chapters investigate a wide range of texts, from newspaper articles, advertisements, periodicals, pamphlets, to private letters, engravings, trial proceedings, cheap biographies, collections of criminal lives, and novels. In each case, I have undertaken an exhaustive search to identify and cross-reference material, and have limited my investigations to the eighteenth century.[68] These texts rarely render a sense of the thief's interiority, and focus rather on their performances. The thieves considered here were selected for discussion due to the sheer wealth and variety of material about them which ensured their enduring notoriety. The variety and richness of sources not only shapes the reputation of each criminal's particular relationship with objects, but also with other members of the criminal community. Each part thus features a violent rogue (Blueskin and Turpin), a noble thief (Sheppard and Maclaine), and an example of corrupt criminality (Wild and Rann). Where male criminals are sharply defined by property ownership, female criminals are often seen as excluded from such a relationship with objects, even as they steal and fence at comparable rates. While custom

67 As very little is generally known about criminals' early life, the chapters are organised according to the thieves' execution date, as provided by the Old Bailey records. With most printed material about thieves published either just prior or following their execution, such a structure also reflects the rate of production of criminal life-writing.

68 Although several of these criminal figures acquire new life in nineteenth century criminal fiction, I have chosen to limit the scope of the project to the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century saw the growing popularity of criminal romances, especially through the work of William Harrison Ainsworth, whose fictionalisation of the life of John Sheppard and Dick Turpin very much shaped modern characterisations of these two criminals. This new focus on the heroification of the noble criminal clearly separates these nineteenth-century texts from their eighteenth-century inspirations.

dictated that only in the absence of any male claim could women hold property, lives of criminals also undergo a shift in focus from materiality for male rogues, to illicit sexuality in lives of female felons. Depictions of female criminals are thus often reduced to their relation to men than their thieving activities.[69] Hence, my thesis does not discuss female criminality except in so far as it plays a part in the biography of the male criminal.

The first chapter is focused on the footpad and housebreaker Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin. His claim to celebrity stems directly from his relationship with two of the most famous criminals of the early eighteenth century, escapist John Sheppard and corrupt thief-taker and gang-leader Jonathan Wild. As such, Blueskin's status as a secondary character in these two rogues' life is translated in his own agency, or lack thereof. On the one hand, he figures as the epitome of the failed and violent thief, who must be contained violent legal and punitive processes and whose successes or failures are intrinsically connected with his ability to control and manipulate the material world. On the other hand, the lack of sources upon which to build accounts of his life also led to his being cast as a picaresque character, a blank slate upon which fantastical, and often familiar, tales can be grafted, and his belonging to the London criminal underworld is constantly questioned. As accounts of his life adapt, borrow, pilfer and reproduce past narratives, the thief himself becomes a shapeshifting object, subject to manipulation and transformation. Meanwhile, the inherent immorality of his profession allows upper- and middling-class audiences to revel in titillating or immoral tales safely contained within the formulaic model of criminal biography.

My second chapter focuses on famed escapist John Sheppard. Arguably one of the

69 See for example *JGHL34*; out of its 158 biographies of felons, only 11 are dedicated to women. Lesser known female criminals, such as Eleanor Symps or Ann Harris, are often said to begin their career through sexual malpractice, and join thieving with prostitution. In addition to murderers, better known female felons generally fall into two categories: the famous madam or courtesan, such as Madam Churchill or the German Princess, or the adventurous woman, such as pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny, or famous seventeenth-century highway-woman Mary Frith, alias Moll Cut-Purse, who tribulations see them donning male apparel to engage in masculine pursuits, often in search of a lover.

most famous eighteenth-century criminals, with a rich textual and even televisual afterlife from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, Sheppard struggles against material indicators of repressive legal power. A trickster able to take control and manipulate the very objects used to imprison him, the escapist turns into a noble and popular hero, defined through his ability to manipulate, displace and redefine the material world in an effort to break free from physical and social limits. The popular thief, a favourite of the mob and polite circles alike, is contained through careful analysis and detailed exposition of his almost preternatural power of escape, while his very body becomes an object, to be owned, protected, or commodified through imprisonment, execution, and dissection. His capacity to escape confining definitions is finally mitigated posthumously in the artistic endeavours of Sir James Thornhill, history and sergeant painter to the king.

Chapter three is centred around Sheppard's nemesis, fence, gang-leader, and thief-taker Jonathan Wild. A well-known figure in both eighteenth-century legal and criminal circles, Wild is particularly threatening because of his manipulation of both legal processes and criminal underworld, maintaining both his reputation for honesty and a staggering business in stolen and lost objects. As Wild claims control over thief, booty, and theft-victim, his biographers raise concerns over deceiving appearances, the suitability of the legal system as a whole, as well as literary copyright. The thief-catcher becomes a classic mock-heroic figure, a trope serving to discredit venal public officials in general, and prime minister Robert Walpole in particular. A hated figure by the time his business model failed and he came to trial, Wild must be contained through exceptionalism, objectification, legal and mob violence, as well as literary satire and fictionalisation. In addition to Henry Fielding's *Life of Jonathan Wild the Great* and its focus on one particular type of objects, clothing and costume, this chapter explores Jonathan Wild's peculiar position within eighteenth-century economic, criminal, and literary markets through his relationship with

the material world.

The second part of the thesis, focused on highwaymen, begins with a chapter on Dick Turpin, a criminal figure whose (fictional) exploits have been made legendary in the nineteenth century with the publication of William Harrison Ainsworth's novel *Rookwood*. Differentiated from other rogues through his use of horses, which sets him apart from other, less genteel rogues, the highwayman is defined through his relationship with a very particular type of property, livestock. Lacking the structure of the London criminal underworld, Turpin recreates, yet also destroys, domestic structures through his appropriation of objects and acts of animorphism, while geographic, professional, as well as literary distance cast him as chattel in a paper war between rival publishers. The highwayman attempts to take control over the legal rituals of trial and execution in order to prevent the commodification of both his living body and his corpse, the court and scaffold becoming a stage for the famed criminal.

Chapter six follows James Maclaine, nicknamed the 'Gentleman Highwayman', who funded his gentleman's lifestyle through highway-robbery. Manipulating dress and accessories in order to pass within the capital's polite circles, the highwayman's career raises anxieties over deceptive appearances and social ambitions, and prompts discourses which assert the visibility of the trappings of 'true' gentility, rank, and politeness. His transgressive potential is also contained through fictionalisation, when the real-life criminal is adapted and cast into the theatrical trope of the Stage Irishman. The aspiring fortune-hunter thus relies on meaningful apparel in order to steal human commodities, naïve and wealthy ladies, through marriage, and his biographers contain his threat by exposing his unglamorous schemes judged against the ethical standards promoted in conduct literature.

The thesis concludes with a later criminal, John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack, a

highwayman famed for his distinct sense of style, and highlights the evolution of criminal accounts' treatment of thieves, their relationship with the material world, as well as the genre of rogue biographies. Where previous criminal figures become satirical alter-egos for morally deficient upper-class behaviours and aspirations, Rann's brand of gentility is entirely popular, as the highwayman fails to emulate polite sociability, but instead defines an alternative, lower-class politeness and nobility. His identity rooted in his extravagant apparel, Sixteen-string Jack is exposed as a lower-class fop, feminised and condemned by satirist who direct their criticism squarely at this example of popular self-definition. As interest in criminal biographies wanes, accounts of rogues' lives serve to only contain the threatening figure of the thief, rather than experiment and satirise within the formulaic, reassuring structures of the criminal life, descent into crime, imprisonment, and final execution. This chapter is followed by a short conclusion, in which I tie together the thesis' main findings and the overarching issues which affect the literary afterlife and representations of male eighteenth-century thieves. As the literary treatment of these real-life criminals evolves depending on legal and printing practices, audience expectations, or the rogue's own (albeit often fictional) exploits, the thief is an ambivalent figure, the site of a balancing act between entertainment and moral values. Thus Blueskin – a criminal caught between antithetical, yet simultaneous, representations as both masterful rogue and ever-failing thief, and the subject of the first chapter.

II - "And [he] Curs'd both his Hand and the Knife for not executing it effectually":[1] Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin[2]

Escapist John Sheppard, and his nemesis, fence, thief-taker, and gang leader Jonathan Wild came to represent antithetical models of the accomplished thief in the eighteenth-century public mind. The representation of Sheppard's skills gained popular support, while that of Wild's craftiness earned him public scorn. Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, footpad and housebreaker, found himself caught in between these two criminal figures, as he worked for Wild but later came to reject his protection to associate with Sheppard. He epitomised their divide by attempting to cut Wild's throat while awaiting trial for a robbery he committed with Sheppard, an attack which came to be celebrated alongside with the rise to fame of his henchman. The notoriety of all three is palpable in the number of biographies, pamphlets, ballads, plays and engravings which are dedicated to them, from their first appearance in the public eye to the present day.[3]

Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, footpad, housebreaker and attempted murderer, first appeared in the London newspapers following his arrest by Jonathan Wild in July 1722, alongside many other thieves and highwaymen. These reports present him and his accomplices as "notorious Highwaymen and House breakers".[4] He came to the attention of

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1 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* ... (London: Printed and sold by John Applebee in Black-Fryers, J. Isted, at the Golden-Ball near Chancery Lane in Fleet Street, and the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1724), 39.

2 As neither the texts nor the thieves examined here are generally well-known, the analysis requires some contextual information. In order to maintain the demarcation between the texts and their historical contexts, I discuss texts in the present tense, and introduce more factual, historical elements in the past tense.

3 William Ainsworth's famously successful novel, *Jack Sheppard* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1839), repopularised these characters in the nineteenth century. They also feature in nineteenth-century children literature. All three individuals have reached the screens in 1969, in the movie *Where's Jack* (Directed by James Clavell. London: Oakhurst Productions, 1969). The latest popular publication focused on Sheppard, Chris Priestley *Jail-Breaker Jack*, was published in 2001 (London : Hodder Children's Books, 2001).

4 *Daily Journal*, Jul. 25, 1722. This report is also reproduced in the *Weekly Journal*, Jul. 28, 1722.

the media again some months later, as he was arrested along with his companions for robberies committed on the Essex road.[5] He then escaped further notice until his arrest for the robbery for which both him and his associate John Sheppard were committed to Newgate, after which the news coverage focused on his attack on Jonathan Wild.

There is no single, independent publication concerning Blueskin's life.[6] Instead, biographies of this violent thief feature alongside those of others in collections of criminal lives, in particular those focused on John Sheppard and Jonathan Wild. He also appears in texts dedicated to these two criminals following their execution in 1724 and 1725 respectively, such as *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard* (1724),[7] *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes ... of John Sheppard* (1724),[8] *The Life and Glorious Actions of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Johnathan Wild* (1725),[9] *Weighley, alias Wild. A Poem, in Imitation of Hudibras* (1725),[10] *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725),[11] as well as Henry Fielding's *Life of*

5 *Post Boy,* Dec. 22-25, 1722. The same report is also printed in the *British Journal* and the *Weekly Journal,* Dec. 29, 1722.

6 There is one mention of Blueskin's dying speech, which would have been published on its own on or shortly after his execution day, in the pamphlet *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead. Being a Letter from John Sheppard to Frisky Moll, and his Executor. Giving a most entertaining Account of his Arrival and Reception at Styx* … (London: Printed for A. Dodd at the Peacock, and W. Bristowe nest the Rose Tavern without Temple-Bar; and sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1725) but I was unable to locate such a text.

7 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724).

8 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard, Giving an Exact Description of the manner of his wonderful Escape from the CASTLE in Newgate, and of the Methods he took afterwards for his Security. Written by himself during his Confinement in the Middle Stone-Room, after his being retaken in Drury-Lane* … (London: Printed and Sold by John Applebee, a little below Bridewell-Bridge, in Black-Fryers, 1724).

9 *The Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde, Generalissimo of the Prig-Forces in Great-Britain and Ireland Introduced with the most Memorable Passages in the Lives of his Ancestors; and concluding With his Behaviour in Newgate, And at the Place of Execution. With An Explanation of the most usual Terms of Art in the Canting Dialect* (London: Printed for H. Whitridge, in Searle-street by Lincoln-Inn Back-Gate, 1725).

10 N.P. *Weighley, alias Wild. A Poem, in Imitation of Hudibras. To which is annex'd, a more genuine and particular Account in Prose, than any yet publish'd, of the most remarkable Events, and Transactions, of his Life, from the Time of his Birth to his Execution. Also Jonathan's last Farewell and Epitaph, with a Song, never before Printed. By N.P. many Years his intimate Acquaintance* (London: Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford-Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1725).

11 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild; Not made up of Fiction and Fable, but taken from his Own Mouth, and collected from Papers of his Own Writing* (London: Printed and Sold by John Applebee, in Black-Fryers; J. Isted at the Golden-Ball near Chancery-Lane in Fleet-street; and the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1725).

Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great (1743 & 1754).[12] He also features in a number of pamphlets, such as *Sheppard in Aegypt* (1725)[13] and *News from the Dead: or, A Dialogue between Blueskin, Sheppard and Jonathan Wild* (1725).[14]

As well as being the first extended biography of Blueskin, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of November 1724[15] is one of the main sources used by later writers. The section dedicated to this criminal is often reproduced in full in other biographies, along with the *Old Bailey Proceedings* of his trial.[16] Another biography, contained in Charles Johnson's *Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Pyrates,...* (1734),[17] was also used in later publications,[18] while the life of Blueskin in the *Malefactor's Register* (1779)[19] summarises the Old Bailey's accounts, and admonishes young people to be grateful to their parents for providing the education which Blueskin abandoned.[20] On the other hand, one original account,[21] contained in *The History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Foot-Pad,*

12 Henry Fielding, *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great. A New Edition. With considerable Corrections and* Additions (London: Printed by A.Millar, in the Strand, 1754) & *Miscellanies by Henry Fielding, Esq*. (Vol. 3. Bertrand A. Goldgar and Hugh Amory. The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding. Oxford: Oxford UP and Wesleyan UP, 1997). The Wesleyan edition includes an appendix detailing the 1754 corrections and additions, to which I will refer when discussing extracts which are not included in the original 1743 version..

13 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead* (1725).

14 *News from the Dead: or, a Dialogue between Blueskin, Shepperd and Jonathan Wild* (London: Printed by J. Thompson, in the Strand, [1725?]).

15 *ONA* November 1724 (OA17241111).

16 *OBP* October 1724, trial of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin (t17241014-43). Both the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of Blueskin are reproduced in James Montagu's *Old Bailey Chronicle* ("Joseph Blake, for a burglary" *MOBC88 [*I:325-331]), while *ST35* (I:449-453), *STSH42* (II:162-169), *BR64* (II:330-337), and *VANM76* (I:273-278) also reproduce parts of the *Old Bailey Proceedings* on the 1723 trial during which he was a witness (*OBP* January 1723, trial of Richard Oakey, John Levee, alias Junks, Matthew Flood [t17230116-27]), as well as the same short biography. This biography, along with the *Ordinary's Account,* is also used in *TC68* (II:110-118).

17 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *JGHL34*, 460-461.

18 It can be found, with minor alterations, in "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, a Foot-Pad and Highway-man" *TLMRC35*, I:363-371, as well as in Captain Mackdonald's "Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *MGHL58*, 1-6.

19 "The Life and Transactions of Joseph Blake, otherwise Blueskin, who was hanged for Burglary" *MR79,* I:387-392.

20 This account was also reproduced in "The Life and Transactions of Joseph Blake, otherwise Blueskin, who was hanged for burglary" *JNCN95,* I:387-392.

21 Although this account is framed with excerpts from the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* (November 1724, OA17241111) and the *Old Bailey Proceedings* ("October 1724, trial of Joseph Blake , alias Blueskin" t17241014-43), it is mainly composed of original and detailed material, much of which cannot be found in any other biographies. It is also one of the longest and most sympathetic to its subject.

and John Sheppard, Housebreaker (1725),[22] failed to influence later accounts, and remains unique in its treatment of its subject.[23]

Although little is known about this criminal's early life, the following biography can be pieced together from judicial and parochial records. Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, was baptised in October 1700 in the All Hallows the Great church in London. The origins of his nickname are unclear, and could either refer to his dark complexion, or be a play on the name of one of his early and well-known associates, William Blewitt.[24] After some basic schooling, he quickly embarked on a life of crime, and became part of several gangs of robbers, most notoriously the Carrick gang, which was later disbanded by the thief-taker and gang-leader Jonathan Wild.[25] He was arrested in 1722 along with several of his companions, against whom he became a witness and was thus able to avoid execution. He was nonetheless imprisoned, as he had resisted arrest. He remained in the Compter prison for over a year, during which he survived thanks to an allowance granted him by Jonathan Wild, who also paid for the treatment of the wound to the head he sustained during his arrest.[26]

Upon his release, he became Sheppard's associate, and was arrested with Sheppard

22 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 85-117.

23 While the journalistic accounts of Blueskin's exploits remain generally neutral, those contained in more costly collections of criminal biographies adopt a much more negative viewpoint, consistent with their socially and financially more affluent audience.

24 Andrea McKenzie, "Blake, Joseph (*bap.* 1700, *d.* 1724)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008). There is a variety of possible meanings for this phrase, the words which compose it and his last name. According to the *OED*, the derogatory term "blueskin" was applied to "A black person or a person of mixed black and white descent" (Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* defines "Blue skin" as "a person begotten on a black women by a white man"). It could also be a play on his last name, as "blake" could be used to describe a "pale, pallid or wan" person until the seventeenth century at least (*OED*). A myriad of negative meanings could also be extrapolated from the use of "blue" (which, as an adjective could be "taken as the colour of plagues and other harmful things", while the verb "blue" means "to embarrass, disconcert") and skin (which can mean "to exact money, property ... to fleece, to swindle, but can also refer to "a purse, a wallet" in criminal slang according to the *OED*). However, none of the texts give any explanation for this nickname, the origin of which can only be subject to conjecture.

25 Mainly composed of Irishmen, this gang of over thirty men collapsed in 1722 following the arrest of its captains. Once their leader, James Carrick, had been tried and executed, Wild was able to capture an impressive number of his followers, earning £900 in rewards in the process. Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 26.

26 *ONA* (OA17241111).

for a burglary on the house of Mr. Kneebone, the escapist's former benefactor, on the testimony of William Field, who was known to have worked for Wild. His notoriety stems from his attempt on the thief-taker's life outside the Old Bailey court, where he cut Wild's throat – but failed to kill him – with a blunt claspknife. Wild was prevented from testifying at the Kneebone trial, yet Blueskin was nonetheless found guilty and sentenced to death.[27] He was hanged on November 11, 1724, after several unsuccessful escape attempts and much publicity concerning his regret at his failure to kill Wild. Although less famous than Sheppard and Wild, he remains a well-known figure for years after his death, and features in the advertisements and title pages of several collections of criminal lives.[28]

An otherwise rather obscure housebreaker and footpad, Blueskin is nonetheless a vital part of the narrative of the other criminal lives with whom the next chapters are concerned, that is, both the famous and unpopular Jonathan Wild, and the famed John Sheppard, Blake's partner in crime. Lampooned as a worthless and cowardly thief in Sheppard's first-person account of his own life, and incriminated by the impeachment of his former acolytes as well as his reputation for violence, Blueskin is in the main portrayed as a clumsy criminal, unable to take control of his narrative without violence, and who can be an object of adulation for the lowest classes only.

Blueskin is repeatedly treated as an object in his own narrative, lacking the agency we will see was ascribed to Sheppard through chivalry or Wild through cunning, as well as incapable of using or mastering the objects around him. His lack of agency is also highlighted by accounts of numerous and failed attempts to emulate his more popular accomplice, Sheppard, and by Wild's ease at manipulating him. Only one of the accounts

27 *Weekly Journal* and *British Journal*, Oct. 24, 1724.

28 See for example the advertisement for *ST35* in the *London Evening Post*, Sept. 14-17, 1734, or *ERR25*, which contains the biographies of many more criminals, yet does not feature Blueskin anywhere but on its title page.

discussed here presents Blueskin in an altogether positive light, allowing him sexual agency and wit, a viewpoint which is generally obscured by the more popular image of a cowardly and incompetent thief. The history of Blueskin is one of failure and violence, epitomised in the one action which brings him fame, his attempted murder of Wild, a murder only averted by the poor quality of his weapon. In this chapter, I argue that, in the Blueskin biographies, criminal success is intimately linked with the criminal's ability to control not only the material world, but also his and his victims' bodies. These narratives do not focus on the thief's interiority. Instead, the criminal becomes a picaresque figure, on which a variety of entertaining – or moralizing – tales can be grafted. While Blueskin is unable to control the objects around him, and to thus assert himself a subject, his relationship with the material world shapes his acceptability not only to the criminal underworld itself, but also as an object of popularity. Meanwhile, the criminal himself is finally subdued through his contradictory representation as an ever-failing thief, whose very body and limbs are turned not only into objects themselves, but even into things beyond his control. Devoid of the distinctive skills which made escapist John Sheppard and gang-leader Jonathan Wild famous, Blueskin becomes an antithetic cipher, alternating between ever-failing thief and picaresque hero. His (in)ability to control and manipulate not only the objects around him, but also his and his victims' bodies, dictate the tone of the narratives, as the figure of the criminal becomes a significant one in the shaping of a ‘modern’ relationship to the material world.

II.1 Uncooperative objects

Blueskin's complex relationship with the material world dominates many of his biographies. Most accounts of his life highlight his difficult relationship with different types of objects. While his booty is rarely commented upon, and is simply listed to

emphasise the extent of his roguery, his active use of tools during his imprisonment receives much more attention. He is depicted as unable to deploy instruments effectually to regain control over his own freedom, even as himself and an accomplice are supplied with the tools for an escape attempt. According to a report in the *British Journal*,

> Duval and Blueskin had been for some Time endeavouring to make their Way out of the Condemn'd Hold, which was not discover'd by the Keepers till the Afternoon before their Execution, where they found two Spring-Saws, two Chissels, and a Pair of Pinchers; with these they had made a Hole eighteen Inches deep in the Wall ..., and had begun to cut their Fetters.[29]

Blueskin and his cellmate Duval are then unable to perform their escape from the condemned hold, despite possessing both tools and time: another newspaper, the *Weekly Journal*, reports that the prisoners "confess'd that they had been provided with the Implements ten Days, and had begun to cut their Fetters, and make the Breach the Night before, but found no Probability of succeeding."[30] Blueskin is thus not able to fully control and manipulate the material world. Although able to sever the link between objects and their subjects through theft, he fails to create the same relationship between himself and other things, and thus to position himself as a subject.

Brought to fame by his attack on Jonathan Wild, Blueskin's reputation as a criminal undone by his own tools is epitomised by his failure to dispatch the thief-taker. While he is routinely described as lacking control over the material world, no object attracts more attention than the ineffectual knife with which he attempts to kill his former master. Featuring in all of his biographies, depictions of this defining moment centre around the material obstacles which prevented the footpad from completing his task. The *Ordinary's Account* thus transcribes Blueskin's response when questioned about the attack: "[Blueskin] answer'd, that none prompted him to that Assault, but a sudden Thought that Moment enter'd into his Mind, or else he should have provided a better Knife, which

29 *British Journal*, Nov. 14, 1724.
30 *Weekly Journal*, Nov. 14, 1724.

would have cut off a Head directly".[31] In this account, Blueskin is not even described as an agent in his own unpremeditated attack: spurred on by a sudden and external impulse which he follows blindly, the thief makes himself as much of an instrument as the inefficient knife he uses. The poor quality of this weapon, which led to Blueskin's failure, is highlighted in most accounts. Thus, the biography of the footpad contained in *Select Trials for Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, And other Offences* describes that "he suddenly drew a Clasp-penknife, and cut Jonathan's Throat; but as the knife was dull, the Wound, tho' dangerous, did not prove mortal".[32] Blueskin's otherwise efficient attack is foiled by the dullness of his blade, and his incompetence becomes the basis for his fame. This worthless weapon is returned to in later texts, such as the pamphlet *Sheppard in Aegypt*, where Sheppard compares the knife he hoped to use for his final escape to Blueskin's: "it prov'd as useless to my Purpose as Blueskin's did".[33] Thus Blueskin's knife becomes a signifier for inefficient tools, just as Blueskin himself turns into a byword for criminal failure.

Blueskin is unable to exercise power on things, and his plans are consistently obstructed by the resistance of the objects around him. The success of his attempt on Wild is not only prevented by the bluntness of his blade, but also by the presence of a simple piece of muslin serving as a necktie: the London newspapers report that

> The said Blake made a violent attempt upon [Wild's] Life by a Surprize, being provided for that purpose with a little Clasp Knife, with which he endeavour'd to cut his Throat; and had it not been for a Muslin Stock that was twisted in several Plaits round his Neck, he had in all likelihood succeeded in his barbarous Design ... the Villain triumph'd afterwards in what he had done, swearing many bloody Oaths, that if he had done the Business effectually, he should have died with Satisfaction.[34]

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31 *ONA* (OA17241111).
32 "Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, for Burglary. October 1724." *ST35*, I:453.
33 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead* (1725), 2.
34 *Evening Post*, Oct. 13-15, 1724. A slightly altered version of this report can also be found in the *British Journal*, Oct. 17, 1724, while the *London Journal* of the same day printed a summary of the attack. Blueskin's pride in this violent act is however underlined in the same terms in each of these reports.

The providential muslin necktie thus thwarts Blueskin's plan, in a rather eerie foretelling of the hangman's noose which will ultimately dispatch the thief-taker. This parallel is picked up by the pamphlet *Sheppard in Aegypt*, where Charon, the Styx's boatman, claims in his poetic dialogue between Blueskin's ghost and Pluto:

> When th'fam'd R—ue in purple Streams lay bleeding,
> Had ebbing Life to distant Regions fled
> A universal Joy in grateful Sounds wou'd spread,
> B—w—n has th'noble Act perform'd, W—d is dead.
> Enough, the Sooty God reply'd,
> He that's to be hang'd, & fate hath fixt th'lot,
> To all's Invulnerable but a H—p—n Knot,
> No wonder then his Throat escap'd the Cut.[35]

"The sooty god" Pluto thus explains Blueskin's inability to kill Wild, the poem's "famed Rogue": destined to hang, he is essentially protected from all weapons but the hangman's rope, and Blueskin's action is turned from a "noble act" to a damning failure.

This link between fabric and the executioner's rope is also exemplified in the slang term used to talk about hanging: the soon-to-be executed Blueskin "said to Mr. Wild, you may put in a word for me, as well as for another Person? To which Mr. Wild reply'd, I cannot do it, You are certainly a dead Man, and will *be* ***tuck'd up*** very speedily" (My emphasis).[36] While to 'tuck up' had been used as a slang phrase for hanging since the late seventeenth century at least,[37] its usage has been mainly associated with cloth and garments. According to the *OED*, the noun 'tuck' could refer to "a fold or pleat in drapery" or a "kerchief worn on the head, a turban", while the movement of 'tucking' serves to shorten or tighten, often with string and needle, in a miniature reenactment of the hangman's noose. A fitting reference to eighteenth-century thieves' main type of booty, linen and clothing, this term also resonates with the fate of the condemned and the

35 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead* (1725), 22.
36 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 39.
37 See the entry for "tuck't" in B.E., *A new dictionary of the canting crew* (London: Printed for W. Hawes, P. Gilbourne and W. Davis, 1699).

executioner's trade: 'to tuck' can also mean “to dress or finish (cloth) after it comes from the weaver”, and “to turn in the edges of (bed-coverings or the like) under the bed or its occupant.” Laid to sleep through execution, the final stage of a criminal career, the thief himself becomes an object in the hands of the hangman, his body held and controlled by the judicial system.[38] Wild himself is marked for the ignominy of the hangman's noose, and hence protected from the footpad's knife by its sartorial representative, the fateful muslin neckcloth.

Moreover, Blueskin's inability to master objects is not limited to the material world around him, and is even extended to his own body. As he gradually loses control over his incarcerated body, his limbs, and in particular his arm, becomes a separate entity, which inefficiency is cursed along with that of the fatally blunt knife in *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard*:

> The Villain triumph'd afterwards in what he had done, Swearing many Bloody Oaths, that if he had murder'd him, he should have died with Satisfaction, and that his Intention was to have cut off his Head, and thrown it into the Sessions House-Yard among the Rabble, and Curs'd both his Hand and the Knife for not executing it effectually.[39]

Including his arm in his curse, and thus in the blame for the failed attempt, Blueskin's lack of control over his ineffectual limb is underlined by his intended treatment of Wild's head, which would have been separated from his body, and thus very efficiently turned into a thing. Another text, *Sheppard in Aegypt*, expands on Blueskin's lack of control over his arm in an epistle claimed to have been penned by Charon, the Styx's ferryman:

> A wretched Ghost, who in hollow Accents cry'd,
> Curs'd be the Arm whose feeble force declin'd
> An Act so advantageous to Mankind[40]

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38 The transformation of the captured thief into an object owned by both jailors and hangman is be discussed in more details in the next chapter, focused on the escapist John Sheppard.

39 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 39. Apart from this addition, the *History of the Remarkable Life of Jack Sheppard* reproduces a report of the incident initially published in the *Evening Post*, Oct. 13-15, 1724.

40 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead* (1725), 20.

Dissociated from its subject, the arm takes on a life of its own, as it is able to actively 'decline' the action, while the thief himself is robbed of any agency through his inability to affect the material world. Unable to perform its task, the arm does not become an object but a thing to Blueskin, beyond the control and comprehension of its supposed subject. In the *Ordinary of Newgate's* Account, this divide is fatefully highlighted by Wild's lieutenant Quilt Arnold's threat as he apprehended Blueskin: Blueskin “having a Pen-knife drawn, swore he would kill any Body that came in. That [Quilt Arnold] reply'd it was him, and Mr. Wild was not far off; saying, throw down your Pen-knife, or I will chop off your Arm: And upon this he threw down the Knife, and he apprehended him”.[41]

Most accounts of Blueskin's live thus present him as an object, whether in his own narratives, or that of others. The popular ballad *Newgate's Garland* (at times attributed to John Gay and to Jonathan Swift) utilises Blueskin's attack on Wild in order to attack the impunity of upper-class law-abiding 'criminals' whose dishonest actions are worse than that of a simple robber. On this text's critique, Blueskin's value is monetary only, as he is sold to the gallows by Jonathan Wild:

> ...How Jonathan's Throat was cut from Ear to Ear;
> How Blueskin's sharp Penknife has set you at Ease,
> And every Man round me may rob, if they please
>
> When to the Old Bailey this Blueskin was led,
> He held up his Hand, his Indictment was read,
> Loud rattled his Chains, near him Jonathan stood,
> For full forty Pounds was the Price of his Blood.[42]

In addition to its monetary value for the thief-taker, Blueskin's body is also turned object by the threat of dissection, as his corpse becomes a rare and precious commodity for anatomists. Although corpses were not legally considered a property, the theft of bodies from the grave was a frowned upon, if lucrative, business. A limited number of executed

41 *ONA* (OA17241111).

42 *Newgate's Garland: Being, a New Ballad, Shewing, how Mr. Jonathan Wild's Throat was cut from Ear to Ear, with a Penknife by Mr. Blake, alias Blueskin, the bold Highwayman, as he stood at his Trial at the Old Bailey. To the Tune of, the Cut-purse* (London: [?], 1724).

criminals' bodies were assigned for medical schools, and the growing demand for dissection material encouraged less legal methods for securing fresh bodies. Executed criminals and body-snatching remained the main sources of dissection materials throughout the eighteenth century, until the creation of a new legal supply of corpses through the 1832 Anatomy Act, that of paupers "too poor to pay for their own funeral. What had for generations been a feared and hated punishment for murder became one for poverty"[43]. While, in the first half of the eighteenth century, a set number of hanged criminal bodies were handed over to anatomists every year, the 1752 'Murder Act' designated dissection as a further punishment for one particular class of criminals, murderers.[44] According to Kate Cregan, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century saw a growing monetisation of the criminal's corpse, as increasing popular resentment against surgeons and professional competition between anatomists transformed what was once an undisputed, legal process into a violent struggle between mob and physicians:

> The Barber-Surgeons had no reason to recompense anyone for untoward behaviour at the gallows until at least 1674; all the payments prior to that were in the nature of regular gratuities or wages for a job performed ... it is clear that it is within [the 1674-1714] period that the pressures that created the circumstances behind the riots against the surgeons arose, creating the need to recompense the beadle, the porter, and the sheriff for their 'pains'.[45]

Criminals and members of the lower classes were particularly at risk of dissection, as 'pauper's graves' were generally shallow and unguarded, and deals could be struck between the executioner and surgeons in need of fresh corpses. According to Ruth Richardson's *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, dissection was a kind of post-mortem punishment greatly feared by the populace to whom it implied a "destruction of identity, perhaps for eternity". As religious beliefs held that body and soul would arise together on Judgement

43 Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), xv.

44 Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned. Dissection and the human body in Renaissance culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 54.

45 Kate Cregan, *The Theatre of the Body. Staging Death and Embodying Life in Early Modern London* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 149.

Day and that “a strong tie between body and personality/soul [existed] for an undefined time after death”,[46] dissection was seen as a major obstacle to resurrection, and as a fate to be avoided at all cost. Despite not being considered a property legally, corpses could be at the centre of a business transactions between the surgeons, the executioners, the body-snatchers or even the soon-to-be executed thief himself.[47]

Threatened with such monetisation of his body, Blueskin attempts to bargain for reassurance. Aware of the inevitability of his execution, and moments before the attack on Wild, Blueskin is shown begging for protection from the surgeons. The *Old Bailey Proceedings* of the footpad's trial transcribe this dialogue between Blueskin and Wild: “Mr. Wild, say no more of it, I know I am a dead Man, but what I fear is, after I am dead I shall be carried to the Surgeons Hall and anatomized: To which Mr. Wild reply'd, He would take Care he should not, he would give him a Coffin”. He also promises him “a good book or two”.[48] Rendered completely helpless by his incarceration and looming execution, Blueskin's situation reverses the relationship between human subject and material object, his fate determined by a very special item, the coffin, and his body becoming the object to be sold and exposed. A metonymy representing a decent burial, the gift of the coffin allows him to avoid the dreaded dissection, through which his body would become material only, his spiritual identity destroyed by the blade of the surgeon.

II.2 Issues in belonging

The uncooperativeness of objects in Blueskin’s life is echoed in his estrangement from the community and hierarchy of thieves of which he is a part. Depictions of Blueskin as an object are not limited to passages concerned with his imprisonment and executions,

46 Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 29 & 7.
47 Public reaction to the surgeons' attempt at securing bodies at executions are discussed in the next chapter, dedicated to John Sheppard.
48 *ONA* (OA17241111).

and are often featured in narratives focused on other criminals. Lacking the popularity of some of his more famous confederates, Blueskin becomes a minor character in their narratives, and is prevented from functioning as a fully-fledged agent. He makes a brief appearance in almost each of the texts dedicated to Sheppard, which were instrumental in shaping later representations of Blueskin as a cowardly and worthless thief. The first-person narrator of the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard*, one of the most successful Sheppard biographies published shortly after his death, thus describes his accomplice:

> Tho' [Blueskin] was an able-bodied Man, and capable of any Crime, even Murder, he was never a Master of a Courage or Conduct suitable to our Enterprizes: and I am of Opinion, that neither of us had so soon met our Fate, if he would have suffer'd himself to have been directed by me; he always wanting Resolution, when our Affairs requir'd it most. ... In short, he was a worthless Companion, a sorry Thief, and nothing but the cutting of Jonathan Wild's Throat could have made him so considerable.[49]

Pitted against his accomplice, Blueskin is represented as a cowardly subordinate to the noble Sheppard, and whose resistance to the escapist's superior influence eventually caused their demise. The footpad himself becomes a rebellious object, whose promising potential in the hands of Sheppard is hindered by the criminals' competition for authority. As a potential challenge to Sheppard's rise to fame, his only appropriate role is that of a supporting character in the Sheppard narratives. Blueskin's popularity is thus actively confined to the notoriety of his botched murder attempt, while this damning appraisal is echoed through almost all of the biographies of Blueskin published in the eighteenth century. Blueskin's presence within the Sheppard narrative remains ambivalent, torn between the need to minimise his part, and that to acknowledge his association with Sheppard. In spite of his scathing judgment against his accomplice, Sheppard cannot be shown to simply abandon him to his fate. An unusual after-thought is thus inserted after his

49 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 15. A similar description is also reproduced in an abridged biography of Sheppard, published in the *Weekly Journal*, Nov. 21, 1724.

narrative: “Postscript: After I had Escap'd from the Castle, concluding that *Blueskin* would have certainly been decreed for Death. I did fully resolve and purpose to have gone and cut down the Gallows the Night before his Execution.”[50]

Although generally accepted, Sheppard's alleged negative assessment of Blueskin as an ineffectual thief is constantly contradicted by the number of successful thieving schemes described in each account of the footpad's life. The Blueskin narratives hence construct a paradoxical criminal figure, at once competent yet ever-unsuccessful. This lasting ambivalence in representations of Blueskin originates from the Ordinary of Newgate's original assessment of his criminal career: “The Malefactor had very uncommon mish-haps in his ill Practices, being always detected”.[51] Largely quoted and paraphrased in many later biographies, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* remains one of the most influential texts about Blueskin, and its image of an ever-failing thief is a pervasive one. Even the most sympathetic biography of Blueskin, contained in the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Footpad, and John Sheppard, Housebreaker,* underlines his unusual bad luck: “Blake had uncommon Mishaps in his ill Practices, more than any of his Companions, being often detected and frequently sent to [prison]”.[52] This description, which is in itself contradicted by the numerous tales of Blueskin's thieving successes related in most biographies, is augmented in later texts, as Blueskin's whole criminal career becomes a complete failure: Charles Johnson thus notes that

> [he] set up for a Robber when he was scarce seventeen; but from that Time to the Day of his Death, [he] was unsuccessful in all his Undertakings, hardly ever committing the most trivial Fact, but he experienced for it, either the Humanity of the Mob, or of the Keepers of Bridewell, out of which, or some other Prison, he could hardly keep his feet for a Month together.[53]

50 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 31.
51 *ONA* (OA17241111).
52 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25*, 87.
53 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *JGHL34*, 461.

This contradiction is not limited to Blueskin's criminal career. His fame is also treated in an ambivalent manner, with reports of the reaction of the mob and of his popularity differing widely from one another. On the way to Tyburn, Blueskin attempts to escape, to the great pleasure of the crowd. The *Evening Post* reports that, "While the Shereffs [sic] Officers were engaged in a great Quarrell about Daval's going in a Coach, Blueskin unty'd his Hands-strings, and was endeavouring to escape out of the Cart, the Crowd of People looking on and laughing all the time".[54] The same incident is however reported in a very different light in another newspaper, the *Weekly Journal*: Blueskin "was endeavouring to get loose the Halter with which he was ty'd, and to have escap'd out of the Cart, the Crowd countenancing the Attempt by a profound Silence".[55] While, in the first report, the crowd enjoys Blueskin's attempts as a worthwhile entertainment, the second report underlines the mob's silent support of the criminal against the power of courts and laws. Although neither description indicates active disapproval on the part of the London mob, their disagreement about the extent of public encouragement for the escape attempt underlines the tentative quality of reports assessing Blueskin's popularity.

While Sheppard or Wild's fame goes unquestioned, treatment of Blueskin's attraction is also ambivalent, as his popularity is not rooted in exceptional talents or systems, but in a violent attempt against a much hated public figure. Charles Johnson's 1734 *Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen* thus comments on the criminal's bid for celebrity: "Blueskin, always deserves to be remembred [sic], as one who studiously took the Paths of Infamy, in order to become Famous".[56] This play on the different meanings of fame, while assigning an active desire for popularity to the long since dead thief, also comments on the problematic nature of criminal popularity. A lucrative opportunity for members of the print trade who are able to monetise the criminal's short spell of celebrity,

54 *Evening Post*, Nov. 10-12, 1724.
55 *Weekly Journal*, Nov. 14, 1724.
56 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *JGHL34*, 460.

criminal biographies nonetheless tread a delicate line between endorsement and denunciation of their subject's actions, from entertainment value and moral condemnation.

The epitome of the ruthless criminal, Blueskin and his popularity amongst the lower classes, as evidenced by the "great Mobb" which was gathered for his funeral,[57] must be contained, yet preserved, in printed materials about the thief, in a balancing act between advertisement and propriety.[58] This ambivalence is not limited to his fame and success as a thief. Instead, his association with and especially his loyalty to different groups, criminal or otherwise, is increasingly questioned in successive accounts. His affiliation with the capital's criminal underworld is defined by the tools of his trade, his weapons. Blueskin's profession, housebreaking and robbing on the highway, is represented by his firearms and the threat of violence: as he is about to get robbed himself, "Blake publickly declared he was one of the same Profession, it would not do, because he had not got his Credentials about him, which is a pair or two of Pocket-pistols, a Rope and [a] Gag".[59] Identifying the thieves, the presence of pistols and the threat of violence associated to them are an important part of criminal acts and their reports. While informing against his former acolytes, Blueskin is reported to mention that: "the other a [sic] Prisoner had each of them a Pistol, and he himself had a Couple".[60] Moreover, in Henry Fielding's highly fictionalised biography of Jonathan Wild, an incensed Blueskin exclaims "Take your Pistols yourself, and go out on the Highway, and don't lazily think to fatten yourself with the Dangers and Pains of other People",[61] setting a hierarchy of criminal honour, in which fences and gang-leaders live off the labour of their company of thieves.

A member of an unspecialised criminal trade, identified by weapons and objects

57 *Evening Post*, Nov. 12-14, 1724.
58 One collection of criminal biographies, *The English Rogue Revived* (ERR25), exhibits an original, if incidental, solution to this dilemma, as it advertises Blueskin on its title page, yet does not provide his biography.
59 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 95.
60 *ONA* (t17230116-27).
61 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, 133.

designed to control and silence potential victims, Blueskin is customarily characterised by his recourse to violence. With a grisly murder attempt as his claim for fame, and a well-established reputation as a thug thanks to the first-person biography of his accomplice, *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes ... of John Sheppard,* Blueskin is represented as a foil, highlighting Sheppard's noble behaviour with his own lack of mercy. This contrast is palpable even in texts dedicated to Blueskin only, who is dehumanised as violent and cruel: the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of the life of Blueskin describes one of his robberies committed with Sheppard, on J. Pargiter, who was struck

> on the Head with [Blueskin's] Pistol, so that he fell down into the Ditch and must have been smother'd, had not Sheppard kept his Head from the Water and Mud, for [Pargiter] was much disguised with Liquor. From this, the Brightwells, two Brothers, were tryed at the Sessions House in the Old-Baily; and had not a great Number of Men sworn to their being during that Evening upon Duty, they must have been Convicted, by the Evidence? The eldest Brightwell dyed with the Grief of it, a Week after his Enlargement.[62]

This episode is also related in Charles Johnson's account of his life, with more emphasis on Sheppard's good action: “immediately Blueskin knock'd [Pargiter] into the Ditch, where he must inevitably have perished, if John Shepperd had not kept his Head above the Mud with great Difficulty”.[63] Blueskin's violence is here used in order to draw a contrast between Sheppard, the skilled and loyal escapist, and Blueskin, the cruel and treacherous footpad.

Despite Blueskin's claim to criminal kinship through violence and firearms, his very membership to the London underworld remains unstable. His own identity as a footpad, that is, according to the *OED*, “a highwayman who robs on foot”, also designates him as belonging to one of the lowest ranks of criminal hierarchy. The *footpad,* or *lowpad*,[64] is

62 *ONA* (OA17241111).

63 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *JGHL34* (460).

64 The same dictionary also defines the footpad simply as an old man, and links this usage to the phrase “one foot in the grave”, calling it a “A Pariphrasis Old man [sic]. He only has the length of his foot” in its *footpad* entry. Interestingly, the *footpad* and *lowpad* entries refer back to each other, yet do not mention the type of criminal these terms might designate. This is particularly puzzling when considering that *lowpad* can hardly be equated to *footpad* in its “foot in the grave” definition, and that this particular text simply ignores the obvious relationship between *highpad* and *lowpad*.

thus the uncouth equivalent of the highwayman, or *highpad*, which B.E.'s 1699 *New Dictionary of the Canting Crew* defines as a "well-mounted and armed" highway robber ("pad" designates both the highway and its robbers). However, Blueskin's affiliation with the lower-classes, criminal or otherwise, is increasingly denied in later biographies, as he is demoted from the status of thief popular with the mob, to abject criminal rejected even by his partners in crime. While the newspaper articles covering his execution described the London lower classes side, to a certain extent, with the condemned, later commentaries on Blueskin's popularity are much less forgiving. The biography contained in Charles Johnson's 1734 collection of criminal lives explains:

> Tho' from the cutting of Wild's Throat, and some other Barbarities of the same Nature, he acquired amongst the Mob the Character of a brave Fellow; yet he was in himself but a timorous, mean-spirited Man, ... equally detested by the sober Part of the World, for the audacious Wickedness of his Behaviour, and despised by his Companions for the Villanies he committed even against them.[65]

Blueskin's celebrity, spurred on by attack on the by then hated thief-taker, is thus of a quality which can only attract the lowest public, the London mob, while his character makes him an object of scorn not only to more genteel audiences, but also to criminal circles. Echoing Sheppard's alleged assessment of the footpad, this account furthers its condemnation by estranging him from his community, and designating him as a thing, devoid of ties with society. Later texts take this estrangement even further, with his criminal activities depicted as attacks on his country, and his execution the just reward to such immorality: a later collection of criminal lives, the *Malefactor's Register*, comments: "This malefactor appears to have been a thief almost from his cradle. His habits of vice increased with his growing years, till at length he died, in the most ignominious manner, a victim to the violated laws of his country".[66] Blueskin is thus wholly alienated from all

65 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *JGHL34*, 461.
66 "The Life and Transactions of Joseph Blake, otherwise Blueskin, who was hanged for Burglary" *MR79*, I:391.

parties, criminal societies to national community. Rejected from all circles, his celebrity based on an act of ruthless violence, his association with more popular, and denigrating, criminals is also severed. Unable to manipulate the material world, and rejecting the authority of a more genteel criminal, Sheppard, Blueskin is gradually separated even from criminal communities, his popularity efficiently suppressed under the image of a violent and irredeemable rogue.

II.3 Criminal successes

However, not every account of the life of Blueskin takes such a negative perspective on its main character. Indeed *The History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Foot-Pad, and John Sheppard, Housebreaker,* published in 1725, describes the footpad in wholly sympathetic terms, and presents a highly fictionalised and comedic version of his antics. While the major part of the book is focused on Jonathan Wild, describing – and condemning - his business ventures in detail, the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* is also unique in the scope of material dedicated to Blueskin. Not only is the footpad's biography substantially longer than that of his more popular accomplice, John Sheppard, it also precedes it, and is concluded with a tirade against the escapist, prompted by his appraisal of Blueskin as a cowardly thief.[67]

All three narratives featured in the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* incorporate diverse materials, from journalistic reports to previous published accounts. However, where the biographies of Sheppard and Wild maintain a veneer of plausibility in terms of sources and content, the

67 While Wild, Sheppard and Blueskin are often placed together in published collections of criminal lives, Blueskin's biographies are consistently much shorter than his acolytes', and often placed in a subordinate position within the book. One extreme example of such a hierarchy can be found in the *English Rogue Revived*, which advertises the trio on its title page but neglects to provide a biography of the footpad.

account of Blueskin's life drifts unapologetically into fiction. Adapted from other criminal narratives, folk tales and story collections such as the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, intertwined with extract of less fantastical texts taken from newspaper articles and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, the narrative houses contradictory representations of the thief, from worthless criminal to resourceful trickster, able to not only manipulate the material world around him, but also human and animal bodies through sexual prowess.

This picaresque tale also differs from other biographies through its appraisal of Blueskin's violence. While other accounts describe him as violent and dangerous thug, violence in the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* is mitigated by the slapstick quality of its narrative. In an adaptation of the *Arabian Night's Entertainments*' tale of the little hunchback,[68] callous murder becomes comedy through the tribulations of the victim's corpse. Planning to embezzle a lawyer enamoured with Blueskin's then mistress, the couple intend to scam him of £100. However, Blueskin kills the lawyer "with a great Club" and pockets the money, bringing the corpse back to his lawyer's lodgings (more particularly, his outhouse) where it is found by an indisposed friend hoping to use the facilities. Afraid to be suspected of the murder, the friend brings the corpse back to Blueskin's house, assuming, rightly, that he is the guilty party. A very frighted mistress informs Joseph that "the dead Body was come back again".[69] The thief then plans to dispose of the incriminating corpse in the river, but observes a gang of robbers on his way,

> who had just robbed a Cheese-monger of two Flitches of Bacon ... which they put in an empty Cellar, which Blake observing, he takes out the Bacon and carries it home putting the Corps [sic] in the room in the Sack. ...The Thieves offered [their] Landlord to sell him a Parcel of Bacon ... , upon which a Couple of Thieves, not dreaming of the Exchange, went and fetched the Sack, which they had no sooner open'd but out pops the Lawyer's Head, at which the Vintner cry'd, Oh! Villains .... Have ye killed Mr. Hamilton, and

68 See *The Arabian Night's Entertainments* (Ed. Robert L. Mack. Oxford & New York : Oxford University Press, 2006), 222-306.

69 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 91.

are so impudent to bring him here to sell him for Bacon.[70]

The thieves are hanged, and the mindless violence committed by Blueskin is obscured by the scatological and comic aspects of the classic to-and-fro of the corpse and its final punch line as the lecherous lawyer is likened to a pig. This alternative appraisal of Blueskin's violent tendencies, which makes use of them in order to bring familiar comedic stratagems to this clearly fictionalised account, thus ignores the usual ambivalence present in texts about criminals. Instead, it constructs an entertaining narrative, going so far as to actively reprise other well-known descriptions of its subject matter, such as the *Ordinary's Account* and John Sheppard's appraisal, and providing a unique positive representation of Blueskin. Far from the image of the marginalised and incapable object presented by other biographies, the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* depicts an astute and successful thief, circulating in a criminal world which he shapes and controls according to his (often carnal) desires.

One of the most salient characteristic of the life-story of Blueskin as told by the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* is his control over subjects and objects alike. Most biographies describe him as unable to control any aspect of the material world, and turn him into a secondary object in his companion's narratives. However, the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* grants him the ability not only to efficiently take possession of objects and things around him, but also to turn subjects into objects under his control. He thus gains the capability to control not only his own body, but also the physical responses of other characters, especially women. Detailing his sexual prowess and his wit, this account delivers a diametrically different image of Blueskin, representing him as a humorous and resourceful thief, and positioning itself in

70 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 94-95.

clear opposition with the other accounts of the thief published at that time.

This narrative is punctuated throughout by accounts of Blueskin's conquests, as his unmatched sexual agency allows him not only to use, but also regulate the bodies of his victims, thus creating a hierarchy in criminal behaviours. Meeting a madam and her newest recruit, he robs and punishes the matron, stripping her naked "for ruining both Body and Soul of many a poor Man and Woman".[71] Here, the otherwise-marginalised thief enforces ethical and social norms in his punishment of a fellow criminal. The madam is punished through the act of thieving, the removal of the clothes, along with her other valuables, leaving her naked in the streets of London while guaranteeing a higher profit for the footpad. She is then at the mercy of those same sexual advances she intended to direct to her unknowing new recruit for her own profit. Meanwhile, Blueskin is described as a popular member of the criminal underworld, as his return to London after a long absence is said to give "much Joy amongst [all the Thieves], as if there had been a General Goal Delivery".[72]

Blueskin's own sexuality in the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* is rooted in the material world, as intercourse is described through more or less imaginative object-centred metaphors. The thief's penis thus becomes a "fiddle" with which he plays music to the great satisfaction of his lodging's servant girls,[73] while female vaginal regions can be 'reset' and fixed thanks to the power of Blueskin's sexuality, or, lacking that, any phallic object operated by the thief: overhearing a rich husband[74]

71 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 86.
72 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 96.
73 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 97. The term fiddle has commonly been used in sexual contexts from the late sixteenth century, and could designate either male or female genitalia, coitus, or a prostitute. Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London: Athlone, 1994), 478.
74 This passage is directly adapted from Alexander Smith's 1719 biography of Isaac Atkinson, a rather obscure highwayman and murderer who hanged in 1640. This particular version is however missing some features from the original, which goes on to describe a servant's attempts to deliver a calf from the cook, and the criminal tricking the husband into slipping his finger into the vagina of an old woman

> say that he would give five hundred Pounds to have her *Tow-Wow*[75] set an Inch higher, [Blueskin]resolved to try one way or other to get this Money, so waiting till the Gentleman and his Servant were gone abroad the next Day, he went to the Lady and told her he was a *Tow-Wow-Setter*, and that he was sent by the *Esquire* to set hers, for which she was to give him five hundred Pounds ... she did, after he had perform'd [the Work to her] Satisfaction, and then *turning her Smock over her Face, he charged her to lye in that Posture, about two Hours, without speaking a Word*. Her Maid seeing what was done, offered him Fourty Pounds to rectify her *Tow-Wow*, which he did at the head of the Stairs, and left her in the same Posture, which the Cock-maid [sic] perceiving, gave him ten Pounds to mend her Kettle too[76], which he had no sooner done but throws her Cloaths over her Head, and slaps the End of a Calves-tail into her *Tow-wow*, charging her not to stir for two Hours, lest she spoil'd the Operation, and then marched off with his Booty.[77]

The thief then runs off, but not without convincing the gullible husband to give him his horse so he can give pursuit to the tow-wow setter. Manipulating and rearranging female bodies with ease, Blueskin is able in the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,... Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* to transform persons into objects, as they become props arranged to facilitate his elaborate subterfuges.

Blueskin thus uses and controls female bodies in order to perform many of his robberies. His mastery over women and their naive husbands reaches extremes as he scams his unhappily-married and gullible lodger, caught double-dealing his clientele, by boasting of his abilities to turn women into animals. Pretending to have turned his own wife into a

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hidden by hay and pretending to be a jar of vinegar missing a cork. The trick is later exposed by the woman's inability to contain her laughter at the husband's reaction to her copious flatulences. Alexander Smith, *A Compleat History of the Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highway-men, Foot-pads, Shop-Lifts, and Cheats, of both Sexes, in and about London and Westminster* (London : printed for Sam. Briscoe, and sold by A. Dodd at the Peacock without Temple-Bar, 1719), II:178-179. The same episode also features in *JGHL34*, which contains a (slightly altered) copy of Smith's biography.

75 From the context, 'tow-wow' stands for 'vagina'. However, I have been unable to find this particular phrase in any cant or slang dictionary. Its use seems circumscribed to variations on the Atkinson narrative in the *HLA25*, Smith's 1719 *Compleat History* (II:173-183) and *JGHL34*. Henry Fielding uses a variation of the term in *Joseph Andrews*, naming the master of the inn which shelters a wounded Joseph after a run-in with highwaymen “Mr. Tow-wouse”, probably in reference to his overbearing wife. Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (Edited by Martin C. Battestin. The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding. Oxford: Oxford University Press and Wesleyan University Press, 1966), 56. One further instance of its use can also be found in Aleister Crowley's 1904 peculiar pornographic text, *Snowdrops from a Curate's Garden.*

76 Kettle here refers to female genitalia. According to Gordon Williams, this particular phrase was popular in bawdy tinker songs since the late seventeenth century. Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language*, 758.

77 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25*, 100-101.

mare,[78] he is tasked to do the same with his host's spouse: “he made her unstrip to the skin, and then putting her upon her Hands and Knees, he got upon her backwards”. The husband stops him, as his wife's animalistic transformation would be mirrored by his own: “however the Landlord for quietness Sake had rather lose his Money, than have his Wife transform'd by pasting a Pair of Horns upon his own Head”.[79] Blueskin's wit and sexual successes allow him to take complete control over female bodies, using, resetting and transforming them at will by treating them as objects to be fixed and owned.

In this narrative, Blueskin is thus represented as a masterful thief, turning the bodies of his victims into objects under his control, an achievement rendered possible by his wit, as he “picked People's Pockets both with his Hands and his Tongue”.[80] Nevertheless, he repeatedly fails to reproduce Jonathan Wild's lucrative monetisation of other criminals' bodies. In addition to his fruitless testimony at his accomplices' trial,[81] Blueskin's attempt to groom a young man into criminality in order to profit from his impeachment fails when his victim has the good sense to disappear after making a profit. The footpad's association with the thief-taker thus mars his reputation within criminal circles, even raising his own gang's suspicions.[82] However, unlike other Blueskin biographies, the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* never questions his affiliation with London's alternate criminal society: although he is robbed near York by highwaymen unconvinced by his claims to professional kinship, as “he had not got his Credentials about him, ... but however they said they did not know him, yet he

78 This motif can also be found in the *Arabian Night's Entertainments*, in the “Story of Sidi Nonman” (*The Arabian Night's Entertainments*, 737-746), in which a necrophagous wife is turned into a mare and whipped daily by her husband as a punishment. Similarly, in Book II of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Occyrhoe, daughter of Chiron, is silenced and turned into a mare for revealing her father's final fate.

79 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25*, 108. Another episode featuring animalistic women occurs later in the narrative, as Blueskin punishes his London landlady for “[fawning] upon him like a Spaniel” by getting her whipped on her way to his room. Her cries waking up her husband, she steals back to bed while he receives his own whipping, after which the whole house is considered haunted. *“The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” HLA25*, 97-98.

80 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25* (99).

81 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25* (92).

82 “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25* (99 & 105).

looked like a Rogue enough, and for that Reason they would give him a Couple of Guineas to buy Bridles and Saddles" to continue his journey.[83] This example of criminal solidarity is followed by a great celebration amongst the London thieves when Blueskin finally makes his way back to the capital, as most thought "that he had been hanged at some neglected Gallows in the Countries, where the People were ignorant of his Worth".[84] Not only is Blueskin's appearance sufficient to identify him as a member of the criminal classes as a whole, he is also considered – albeit sarcastically – as a celebrated associate in the London thieving community.

Moreover, Blueskin's picaresque representation in the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* allows the otherwise despised footpad to take on a new role, that of popular righter of wrongs. Not only are his fictional victims either lecherous, adulterous or corrupt, he also takes on a Robin Hood character, returning another highwayman's sizeable booty to his victims, very poor countrymen,[85] while he justifies his choice of profession to a remonstrating minister by asserting that "he did not believe it to be any Sin, because he kept close to the Text, *To feed the Poor and the Rich send empty away"* (original emphasis).[86] A rather simplistic variation on the common mock-heroic content attached to criminal biographies – in which satire rests on the opposition between high style and lowly subject matter – this classic characterisation of the criminal as a lower-class agent of justice turns the despised thief into popular hero.

The diversity of sources used to craft the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard*' narrative hardly allows for a straightforward interpretation of the criminal as heroic. Instead, it creates a

83 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25* (95).
84 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 96.
85 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 106-107.
86 "The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin" *HLA25*, 106. A paraphrase of Luke I:53 "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away".

rather puzzling multifaceted figure, fluctuating between luckless criminal, callous thief and disruptive enforcer of popular justice. Blueskin becomes an interchangeable archetype, an almost blank canvas on which fiction, as well as other lives, can be grafted.[87] As violence is transformed from threatening to comedic, both criminal and social success depend on the thief's ability to control not only material objects, but also, more importantly, human bodies. Blueskin's lack of remarkable features, coupled with his association with two of the most famous criminals of the early eighteenth century, converts his narrative into a moralizing tale, a printed reflection of the Tyburn ritual, designed to inspire fear into potential criminals. However, this very absence of characterisation also invites alternative representations of criminality, where the thief becomes an agent of justice instead of the victim of a just and all-powerful legal system. The multiplicity of conflicting versions of his character and narratives which coexists within the *History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild,...Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, … and John Sheppard* blurs the limits between objects, bodies and individuals. All of these categories can not only be owned and manipulated, but can also be stolen, as the next chapter on John Sheppard demonstrates.

87 This property is not limited to Blueskin in the *History of the Lives*. The influence from Smith's biography of Isaac Atkinson is palpable throughout the narrative, as Blueskin takes on Atkinson's character traits (namely, his dislike of lawyers, “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25*, 109-110), while Atkinson's last words “a short Life and a merry one” is attributed to John Junks and Richard Oakee, Blueskin's accomplices. “The Life of Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin” *HLA25*, 92.

III - "Cash, Bonds, Notes, and other easy Moveables":[1] John Sheppard

One of the most famous eighteenth-century criminal, John Sheppard rose to fame following his daring escapes from a number of London prisons. His life inspired a wide range of texts, many of which were reworked and reprinted in later collections of criminal biographies. His successive escapes were well documented in the London newspapers, with the most prolific, the *Daily Journal*, publishing over twenty news pieces on Sheppard between September and December 1724. His popularity was sufficient for the printer John Applebee, who made much of his revenue by publishing such material as the *Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts* and the dying speeches of the executed, to publish a first biography directly after Sheppard's escape from the Castle, *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard* (1724).[2] Several biographies followed his execution, with Applebee's second production, *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard*,[3] allegedly written by the escapist himself, getting a great deal of publicity, spurred by Sheppard's public endorsement on his execution day.[4] This particular biography went through at least seven editions by December 1724. It excited the ire of the narrator of

1 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard: Who was executed at Tyburn, November the 16th, 1724. By way of familiar Letters from a Gentleman in Town, to his Friend and Correspondent in the Country* (London: Printed for Joseph Marshall, at the Bible in Newgate-Street, 1724), 14.

2 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724). Although it was not unusual for a particularly famous felon to have several biographies published on or soon after their execution day, biographies published in the criminal's lifetime are much rarer.

3 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724). This biography, along with *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes*, was adapted in *SIAL60* (II:193-228), which compiles a slightly shortened version of the *History*, followed by an excerpt from the *Narrative* to cover the events from the escape from the Castle to the execution. The "Memoirs of the Life and Surprizing Exploits of Jack Sheppard, convicted of Burglary" *BR64* (280-330) reproduce the same text, with some additions from "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35* (I:435-449).

4 *Daily Journal*, Nov. 17, 1724. Both the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* and the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* were attributed to Daniel Defoe in William Lee's *Daniel Defoe: His Life, and Recently Discovered Writings* (London: John Camden Hotten, Picadilly, 1869, 383-390). However, these attributions are strongly disputed by P.N. Furbanks and W.R. Owen in *Defoe De-attributions: A Critique of J.R. Moore's Checklist* (London: Hambledon, 1994, 136-138) along with other materials printed by Applebee and later attributed to Defoe.

G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard*, the third and last account of Sheppard's life published in 1724, which decries the *Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* as a "Spurious Copy" and an "Affront", clearly the "Handy-Work of another of Mr. A-----by's faithful Garretteers".[5] Sheppard is also the hero of several theatrical entertainments, such as John Thurmond's *Harlequin Sheppard*,[6] a pantomime performed at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, and the *Quaker's Opera* (1728),[7] a Bartholomew Fair singing adaptation of *The Prison-Breaker; or, the Adventures of John Sheppard, a Farce* (1725),[8] which never made it to the stage. He also features in several short satirical pamphlets as well, such as "A Dialogue between Julius Caesar and Jack Shepherd"[9] and *Sheppard in Aegypt* (1725).[10]

Sheppard also appears in a number of collections of rogue biographies. As early as 1725, he is featured in both *The English Rogue Revived, or, The Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild …, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin .. and John Sheppard*,[11] which contains the biographies of many additional criminals, and in the similarly-named *History of the Lives and actions of Jonathan Wild,... Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, ...and John Sheppard*.[12] A very short (and rather inaccurate) account of his life can also be found in Alexander Smith's *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, together with the*

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5 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724), 72-73.

6 Thurmond, *Harlequin Sheppard* (1724).

7 *The Quaker's Opera, As it is Perform'd at Lee's and Harper's Great Theatrical Booth in Bartholomew-Fair. With the MUSIC prefix'd to each SONG* (London: Printed for J.W. And sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane; A. Dodd, at the Peacock without Temple-Bar; and E. Nutts and E. Smith at the Royal Exchange, 1728).

8 *The Prison-Breaker; or, the Adventures of John Sheppard, a Farce. As intended to be Acted at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's-Inn Fields* (London: Printed for A. Moore, near St. Pauls, 1725).

9 *British Journal*, Dec. 4, 1725. This particular text was reprinted, along with accounts of Sheppard's life, in many of the eighteenth-century collections of criminal biographies (a trend which started in *ST35*, and which continued as later collections often published a more or less adapted version of that particular text; see *VANM76* and *MOBC88*.). It can also be found in Matthew Concanen's *Speculatist: a Collection of Letters and essays, Moral and Political, Serious and Humourous, upon Various Subjects* (London: Printed by J. Watts, for the Author, 1730).

10 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead. Being a Letter from John Sheppard to Frisky Moll, and his Executor* (1725).

11 "The Life of Jack Sheppard, &c." *ERR25* (unnumbered [105-125]).

12 "The Life of John Sheppard" *HLA25*, 119-144.

History and Lives of Modern Rogues (1726).[13] However, the most influential accounts (apart from the Applebee productions) of his life are to be found in Capt. Charles Johnson's *General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, &c.* (1734)[14] and in *Select Trials … at the Session-House in the Old Bailey* (1735),[15] which texts have been adapted in many later collections.

Although, like many criminals, little is securely known about John Sheppard's life, the following biography can be reconstructed from parochial, journalistic and legal records. Born in 1702, Jack, or more accurately John,[16] Sheppard was the son of a Spitalfield carpenter. He was given a basic education after his father died in 1706, after which he was placed as a servant boy to a woollen draper, Mr. Kneebone, and finally apprenticed to Owen Wood, a carpenter, in 1717. A talented apprentice, he was however allegedly introduced to bad company at the nearby alehouse, and committed his first theft in 1722. He abandoned his apprenticeship in favour of a life of crime a year later, committing burglaries with his brother, and cohabiting with Elizabeth Lyon, or Edgeworth Bess, a prostitute.[17] He was first arrested in April 1724, and escaped from the St. Giles roundhouse through the roof. He was arrested again in May, and lodged with Lyon in the Newgate Ward in New Prison. The couple escaped by descending twenty-five feet from their window to the prison yard with a makeshift rope, before climbing over the tall perimeter wall. He then went on to carry out a spate of burglaries with his associate

13 "Jack Sheppard, a Housebreaker, and Foot-Pad: William Blewet, Edward Bunworth, alias Frazer, Emanuel Dickenson, &c. Foot-Pads, and Murderers: Christopher Leonard, and John Dyer, alias Jack the Cobler [sic], Highwaymen." *SMLT26*, 277-287.

14 "The Life of John Shepherd" *JGHL34*, 461-464. This biography was adapted in "The Life of the famous John Shepherd, Foot-Pad, House-Breaker, and Prison-Breaker" *LMRC35* (I:371-388), which contains minor additions, and in *MGHL58.*

15 "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35*, I:435-449. This text reproduced in *VANM76* , shortened in *MOBC88,* and adapted in *TC68* and *MR79*.

16 Although he is widely remembered as *Jack* Sheppard, he was christened *John* (see Philip Sudgen, "Sheppard, John [Jack] (1702–1724)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008.), the name by which he is referred to in this chapter, with the exceptions of some quotes, which are a reflection of the original texts.

17 Her bad influence is often denounced as the driving force behind John's descent into criminality (*Daily Journal*, Sept. 11, 1724).

Blueskin.[18]

In July 1724, the pair burgled the house of Sheppard's former benefactor, Mr. Kneebone, who turned to Jonathan Wild, the famous fence, thief catcher and gang leader, to retrieve his property and bring the perpetrators to justice.[19] Sheppard was quickly apprehended by Wild and brought to trial at the Old Bailey in August, where he was found guilty of the Kneebone robbery and condemned to death.[20] He made his escape four days before his planned execution, filing one of the bars of the condemned hold and leaving Newgate with the help of Lyon and another woman, his irons hidden under a nightgown. He was retaken some days later, disguised as a butcher, and jailed in isolation in the Castle strongroom in Newgate, his fetters and chains nailed to the ground with a horse padlock.[21] He nonetheless accomplished his most spectacular escape, freeing himself of his handcuffs, climbing up a chimney, breaking down six strong doors on his way to the top of the jail, and using his blanket to let himself down onto the roof of a neighbouring house. He was however arrested again some days later, dead drunk and richly dressed, in a brandy shop in Drury Lane. His fame was then at its peak, and his Newgate cell crowded with visitors. Despite planning for further escape attempts, he was hanged at Tyburn in November 1724, in front of an immense audience.[22]

In these accounts, criminal success is measured by the thieves' ability to control and manipulate the functions and meanings of the objects around them. While Wild depends on his mastery of sartorial representation in order to maintain his influence on both criminal and judicial circles, Sheppard defies the social and penal structures through his ability to redefine the objects of imprisonment. First presented as an uncouth and violent

18 Sudgen, “Sheppard, John [Jack] (1702–1724)”.
19 Wild's advertisement for Kneebone's goods was published in *The Daily Post*, July 27, 1724.
20 *OBP* “August 1724, trial of Joseph Sheppard” (t17240812-52).
21 *Evening Post*, Sept. 10-12, 1724.
22 *Daily Journal*, Nov. 17, 1724.

housebreaker, he comes to be portrayed as a loyal and resourceful trickster, gaining more popular support with each of his evasions.[23] Sheppard is not brought to life in these representations through the descriptions of individual, spiritual or psychological character traits. Instead, his identity is defined by his effect on the material world, as he redefines and manipulates the objects which he steals to transform his social status, or those which are supposed to keep him in his place, both physical and social. John Sheppard's popularity rests on his capacity to transgress legal and physical boundaries. This chapter considers in turn the objects he steals, the tools of imprisonment and escape, items of dress, and finally Sheppard's own status as a thing to be bought, sold and displayed for the legal system and his audience alike.

III.1 Easy moveables

Objects and their financial, but also emotional, value are at the centre of representations of John Sheppard's life, inevitably perhaps given the nature of his chosen profession. His criminal activities, which encompass not only housebreaking, but also shoplifting and highway robberies, all revolve around the seizure of portable belongings and their movement from their lawful and proper location to spaces of illegality and uncertain status. Textual representations of Sheppard thus focus almost tediously on the accumulation of stolen things. Minute lists of the content of his booty abound, not only in the journalistic records of his activities, but also in many of the biographies which map his slow progression towards serious offences. In the *Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard*, allegedly written by the escapist himself, Sheppard speaks of

23 While Philip Rawlings wonders, in his introduction to one of Sheppard's biography, at "the degree of attention which was given to his escapes from Newgate" and speculates that it might have been the result of a "dearth of news" that summer (Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices*, 34), there is an argument to be made that Sheppard's fame was more than the result of newspaper coverage, as the reports of petitions to commute his sentence to transportation (*Daily Journal*, Nov.10, 1724), the large amounts of money the keepers of Newgate received from curious visitors, who included James Thornhill, the security preparations surrounding his execution and the riot which broke out over his body suggest.

his first experience of robbery thus:

> It has been said in the *History of my Life* that the first Robbery I ever committed was in the House of … a Piece-Broker.... To my Sorrow and Shame I must acknowledge my Guilt of a Felony before that, which was my stealing two silver Spoons from [a] Tavern.[24]

This first and rather inconsequential theft is followed by many others, and Sheppard's robberies come to include items of much higher value. Each theft is dealt with in turn, whether it amounts to no more than half a crown taken from a lady's servant travelling by coach,[25] or to a staggering three hundred pounds worth of "Cash, Bonds, Notes, and other easy Moveables".[26] Thus, accounts of his life take pains to describe in details the manner and outcome of his attempts, along with the many tricks he uses to control his victims, who are generally left unharmed. Only a handful of accounts, adapted from the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, containing a Particular Account of his many Robberies and Escapes*' description of an attack against Mr. Kneebone, depict Sheppard making use of any kind of unprovoked violence.[27] Most accounts depict him as a non-violent thief instead.

Sheppard is commonly described as removing a large amount of objects from the houses and shops he visits, and many of his earlier crimes were committed in houses in which he was working as a journeyman or, before he left his master, as an apprentice. Consider this enumeration of the contents of his booty, taken from the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard*, which presents the reader with a chaotic amalgam of objects: "viz. seven Pound ten Shillings in Specie, five large silver Spoons, six plain Forks ditto, four Tea-Spoons, six plain Gold Rings, and a Cypher Ring; four Suits of Wearing

24 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 6.
25 "The Life of Jack Sheppard, &c." *ERR25* (unnumbered [114]).
26 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724), 14. While cash and bonds are portable goods, they are also a form of textual currency for which, Mary Poovey argues in *Genre of the Credit Economy*, "it seemed crucial to make and reinforce a distinction between fact and fiction." (*Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 4-5), a distinction depending on public trust, and endangered by individuals like Sheppard.
27 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 3.

Apparel, besides Linnen, to a considerable value".[28] In addition to their historical interest,[29] these lists of disappeared belongings highlight the severed link between object and subject. Stolen from the other unnamed tenants who shared house with Sheppard, these particular objects have turned into things, their individual substance irremediably lost (particularly in the case of the cypher ring, which loses its symbolic meaning once removed from its owner), and themselves reduced to their hard monetary value, the thief's primary interest. Only one text, the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard*, informs its readers of the fate of some of the booty, as Sheppard "made all the Reparation that was in [his] Power, by telling [Mr Bains and Mr. Kneebone] where the Goods were sold, part whereof has been recovered by that means".[30] Less focused on repentance and self-deprecation, other biographies are, on the other hand, content to list the property stolen during his numerous thefts. The booty then remains in obscurity as the thief himself limits his interactions with his loot to a rapid, and often disappointing, sale.

Lacking the ability to make easy money out of any emotional or personal value his booty might have had for their original owners, Sheppard can only rely on their potential monetary worth to profit from his activities. In the absence of a police force, it was common for thieves and their victims alike to advertise the 'loss' of their items in newspapers, offering a reward and no questions asked to whoever would return them. Jonathan Wild built much of his business and reputation through such services, reuniting stolen property with its owners thanks to his thorough knowledge of the London underworld, which he controls almost completely through his activities as gang-leader and

28 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 5.

29 Such lists, along with inventories after death or loss and damages from natural causes, are often used by historians seeking to reconstruct the material aspects of daily life. These particular items were apparently stolen from the house of "Mr. Charles in May-fair, near Piccadilly", one of Sheppard's landlords and employers (*The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* 1724, 5). See for example John Styles' use of trial records and household accounts in *The Dress of the People* (2007).

30 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 9.

thief-taker. As he famously refused to work with Jonathan Wild,[31] Sheppard deals exclusively with things in terms of their market value, rather than their value to their lost owners. Most of the biographies which detail the particulars of his thefts summarise the extent of his victims' losses, which can be as high as fifty pounds.[32] Such valuations are not inconsequential however. Indeed, it is the value of the stolen goods which differentiates grand from petty larceny, and hence hanging from transportation: according to Frank McLynn,

> breaking and entering private property with felonious intent was the most common capital offence in the eighteenth century. …. It was a non-clergyable[33] offence to break and enter by day if anyone was put in fear by the act, or if goods worth more than five shillings were stolen. …. Burglary [or housebreaking by night] had been a capital offence before 1688… Theft of goods valued at more than twelve pence was grand larceny, punishable by death but usually clergyable …. A statute of 1699 made it a capital offence to steal goods valued at more than five shillings from a shop.[34]

The value of the stolen items was thus a pivotal aspect of trials for theft, with many juries blatantly undervaluing stolen goods to spare certain offenders. Value then becomes an organising force not only within the relationship between stolen objects, thief and victim, but also in the altered power-relation between defendant, prosecutor, judge and jury, the unresolvable loss of the goods looming over the trial. The potential change in value operated by this judicial ritual is mirrored in the thief's attempt to sell off his ill-gotten merchandise: Sheppard declares in the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* that "when Goods (the intrisick Value whereof has been 50l.) have been in

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31 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 16.

32 See for example the *British Journal*, Nov. 7, 1724, or the *Daily Journal*, Nov. 2, 1724, but also the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 12, the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 7, "The Life of Jack Sheppard, &c." *ERR25* (unnumbered [109]), or "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35* I:443, all of which list the items stolen by Sheppard to then attempt to evaluate their worth, while their owners are barely mentioned.

33 "Of an offence: Admitting benefit of clergy; in regard to which benefit of clergy may be pleaded." ("clergyable", *OED*). Benefit of clergy granted immunity from capital punishment, and could only be claimed once.

34 Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 87-92.

[his] hands, [he has] never made more than ten Pounds of them clear money".[35] By turning the valuable object into a stolen thing, the thief practically strips it of much of its worth, which it can only regain by returning to legal ownership, when it becomes an object again (rather than a stolen good) for a new owner.

The focus on the material aspects of Sheppard's profession is however not limited to his loot. Removing portable belongings from their proper location, the thief must also break down or disable the defences of the house or shop he is pillaging. The *Old Bailey's Proceedings* of Sheppard's trial thus describes the robbery of the Kneebone house, from which "118 Yards of Woollen Cloth" were stolen: "The Prosecutor … found his House broken open, the Bar of a Cellar-Window having been cut, and the Bolts of the Door that comes up Stairs drawn, and the Padlock wrench'd off, and his Shutter in the Shop broken, and his Goods gone".[36] While the goods are simply "gone", the house itself is presented as the victim of a violent attack. It has been "broken", "cut" and "wrenched". Such a display of aggression is persistent enough in Sheppard's activities to allow the narrator of G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard* to regularly play on military vocabulary, with Sheppard described as "laying siege" and "[blockading] his Enemy", his tools becoming "Artillery" and his loot "the Enemy's Ammunition".[37] Frank McLynn notes that analogies between housebreaking and rape were common in the eighteenth century, with the thief depicted as forcing himself on the domestic spaces which he robs.[38] J.M. Beattie comments that this offence "was particularly condemned because it violated the privacy and protection of the house".[39] In addition to value, this breach of privacy is also used to differentiate between petty and grand offences, theft and housebreaking, which becomes punishable by death should it cause fear to the inhabitants

35 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 10.
36 *OBP* (t17240812-52).
37 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724), 31-32.
38 McLynn, *Crime and Punishment*, 89.
39 Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 162.

or be committed by night. In taking personal belongings, and breaching the ineffectual defences of the house, Sheppard does more than simply break the link between objects and their subjects: he also gains mastery over the house itself, which is no longer a solid and safe repository. The owner's control over his property as well as his chattels is destroyed, and the private space desecrated.

Sheppard's professional success thus resides in his ability to seize control over inanimate objects, separating them from their owner in an effort of redefinition. However, it is not only the shopkeepers and artisans who can fall victims to criminals. Robbers can also participate in a game of rob-thief. Several instances of rob-thief occur in the Sheppard narratives, each with disastrous consequences for those involved. The particulars surrounding Sheppard's and Blueskin's trials and condemnations for the Kneebone robbery are murky at best. They were both impeached by William Field, whose testimony was conveniently altered in time for each individual trial in order to designate the defendant of the day as the brains of the operation, in which Field allegedly participated.[40] Field's testimony was denounced by both prisoners, who denied that he had any part in the robbery, and maintained that he instead stole their booty from their own warehouse. This version of events is been commonly accepted by Sheppard's later biographers: while the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* portrays Sheppard and Blueskin "[concluding], as it appeared, that Field had plaid at Rob-Thief with [them]",[41] *The History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Footpad, and John Sheppard, Housebreaker*, which was published less than a year later, states that Field stole the cloth "[and] took care to hang them, not doubting then to have a good Bargain of it, for he thereby not only came into the Reward, but got clear of all Robberies formerly committed".[42] Sheppard and Blueskin's loss of control over their

40 See *OBP* (t17240812-52) & October 1724(t17241014-43).
41 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 11.
42 "The Life of John Sheppard" *HLA25,* 127.

booty thus brings about their demise, as the thieves themselves fall victim to robbers.

However, Field is not the only criminal to play rob-thief, as Sheppard himself engages in a very literal version of the game. G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard* includes a copy of a letter allegedly written in the name of the (by-then escaped) thief by another of his accomplices, Jonathan Lamb, who hoped it would frighten his accuser into dropping his case, and thus save him from transportation. In this letter, the fake Sheppard proudly comments that he "play'd at *Rob-Thief* with the Goal".[43] Through his escape from Newgate prison, Sheppard robs several potential "thieves": his jailors, who were not immune to bribery and commonly charged prisoners extortionate rates for basic services; Jonathan Wild and William Field, who could expect to share the reward which was offered to successful thief-catchers; Jack Ketch, whose loss was satirised in a fictional exchange of letters between Sheppard and the executioner published in different newspapers,[44] and through him, the justice system as a whole. The satirical implications of Lamb's letter, which does not reflect well on any members of the eighteenth-century legal and punitive system, also label Sheppard as an object to be stolen, and Sheppard's escape as a robbery.[45]

III.2 Imprisonment and escape

Popular reactions to Sheppard's escapes differ on the basis of class. While the 'rabble'

43 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724), 26

44 *Parker's London News*, Nov. 11, 1724. The same letters were also printed in the *Weekly Journal*, Nov. 14, 1724, while a shorter version of Sheppard's letter can be found in the "Memoirs of the Life and Surprizing Exploits of Jack Sheppard, convicted of Burglary" *BR64*, 306, and in *SIAL60*, II:213-214. Several other letters (allegedly) written by Sheppard were also published both in newspapers and in some of his biographies, such as letters to his mother (*Parker's London News*, Oct. 23, 1724 and *Evening Post*, Oct. 20-22, 1724) as well as to Applebee, the printer, and Austin, his prison guard (G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* [1724], 58-61). G.E.'s account also contains a letter to his mother, (58-59). These three letters were also reproduced, with minor modifications, in *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 141-142. The letter to Applebee can also be found in *MOBC88*, 321-322, while "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35*, I:443, (reproduced in *VANM76*, I:263-264) and *TC68*, II:98-99, contain both letters to Applebee and Austin.

45 The 'thingness' of Sheppard himself is discussed in the fourth section of this chapter.

delights in his antics, these are constructed as a potential danger to the propertied classes, with different biographies clearly pandering to different audiences: the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, containing a Particular Account of his many Robberies and Escapes* and G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard* are thus directed at the propertied classes. One is alarmist (The *History*) where the other (the *Authentic Memoirs*) is humorous and leans toward a mock-heroic reading of Sheppard's actions. These accounts were also more expensive to purchase, at one shilling each, while most criminal biographies, such as the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard*, were priced at sixpence. Those texts that appear to have appealed to and be marketed at a less affluent audience, such the *Narrative*, as well as accounts in other genres such as *Harlequin Sheppard* and the *Quaker's Opera*, describe Sheppard at least in a sympathetic light, if not with outright admiration.[46] The biographies of Sheppard which appear in the collections of criminal lives published in the first few years after his death tend to present him in a neutral, if not negative view, whereas later biographies are much more forgiving.

Ian Bell draws attention to the malaise which surrounds some aspects of the criminal law in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*:

> whereas the civil code seemed to weave a fabric of cultured civilisation, the criminal codes could look like the flagrant exercise of power and violence to secure rights and property for a few … [however] in most of its operations, the law was not a direct and unmediated articulation of power, but an ideological transfiguration of class values, shrouded in ritual, mystery, and ceremony.[47]

Bell goes on to discuss eighteenth-century anxieties about “the growth of crime and the dangers it presented to the public”.[48] Sheppard's escapes are then embedded within a wider

46 On the other hand, the play on which the *Quaker's Opera* is based, *The Prison-Breaker; or, the Adventures of John Sheppard, a Farce*, is rather neutral in its treatment of Sheppard, reserving its satire for the keepers of Newgate, the Irish, and thief-catchers. Intended for the Lincoln's-Inn Fields Theatre, it went straight to publication and never made it to the stage.

47 Bell, *Literature and Crime*, 9.

48 Bell, *Literature and Crime*, 13.

discourse on criminality, which tends to foster a sense of seemingly uncontrollable danger to an otherwise law-abiding and civilised population. His attacks on private and public property, homes and prisons alike, endangers the established social order, while the authorities' inability to keep him confined participates in a growing anxiety about criminality as a whole. The *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes*, which was published before his execution and while he was still on the run after his escape from the Castle, describes the threat he poses to its readers:

> not only your Properties, but even your very Lives are every way struck at... here's a Criminal bids Defiance to your Laws and Justice, who declar'd and has manifested that the Bars are not made that can either keep him OUT, or keep him IN (original emphasis).[49]

Sheppard is not only menacing his victims' belongings and lives, but also the social order, as he refuses to abide by its rules and abuses its privileges. G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard* thus comments: “Liberty and Property are the two Darlings of an English Subject. But Sheppard always made a bad Use of both”.[50]

The anxiety which attaches to Sheppard seeps into descriptions of his interaction with the material aspects of imprisonment. His fame attains its peak with his successful escape from the Castle. Descriptions of this escape are focused on its technical details: the *Daily Journal* reports that he “broke through a thick Wall [with only the help of a flat Iron Bar] … wrench'd off [the Locks] and forced his way through five other strong Doors … and descended [from the roof] by a Blanket, which he fasten'd to the Wall”.[51] Illustrations depicting his escape offer legend-lines detailing the technicalities of the obstacles which stood in its way (see for example the engravings which illustrate G.E.'s *Authentick*

49 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), ii-iii.
50 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724), 52.
51 *Daily Journal*, Oct. 17, 1724.

Memoirs, figure I). These texts present Sheppard as toying with doors, locks and bars, taking control of them and even making use of them to break out successfully. *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard* thus show his jailors finding "the Doors ready open'd to their Hands; and the strong Locks, Screws and Bolts broken in pieces, and scatter'd about the Jayl".[52] Sheppard turns the tools of his imprisonment into those of his liberation, in a bid to regain the agency normally lost to the condemned, especially one chained so well. Bending doors and locks to his will, he makes these objects his, in a violent attack against the jail. In the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard*, the escapist celebrates his own 'magical' powers over the accoutrements of his imprisonment in the following terms:

> [I] made the Door fly before me … and came to another strong Door, … fasten'd by a very strong Lock, [yet] in less than half an Hour, with the main Help of the Nail from the Red Room, and the Spike from the Chapel, wrench'd the Box off, and so made the Door my Humble Servant.[53]

Using the very things supposed to keep him in (a link from his chains and the bar blocking the chimney by which he escapes were his main tools), Sheppard is shown regaining the control lost through his sentence, acquiring power over the objects of the law, and redefining them to fulfill his own purposes.

On the other hand, not all accounts of this famous escape treat it as a violent attack. The 1724 mock-heroic account of Sheppard's feats, G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard*, sarcastically explains that "[Sheppard] was so Honest, as to leave the Locks, Bolts, and Bars behind him, and only remov'd them a little from their proper Places".[54] Far from a display of violence, the escape is here described as a gentle rearrangement of the objects of imprisonment, which, although they have been transformed into moveable property by Sheppard's actions, are not of a value

52 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes (*1724), 42.
53 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724). 20-21.
54 G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724), 48.

Figure I: Sheppard's escape from the Castle

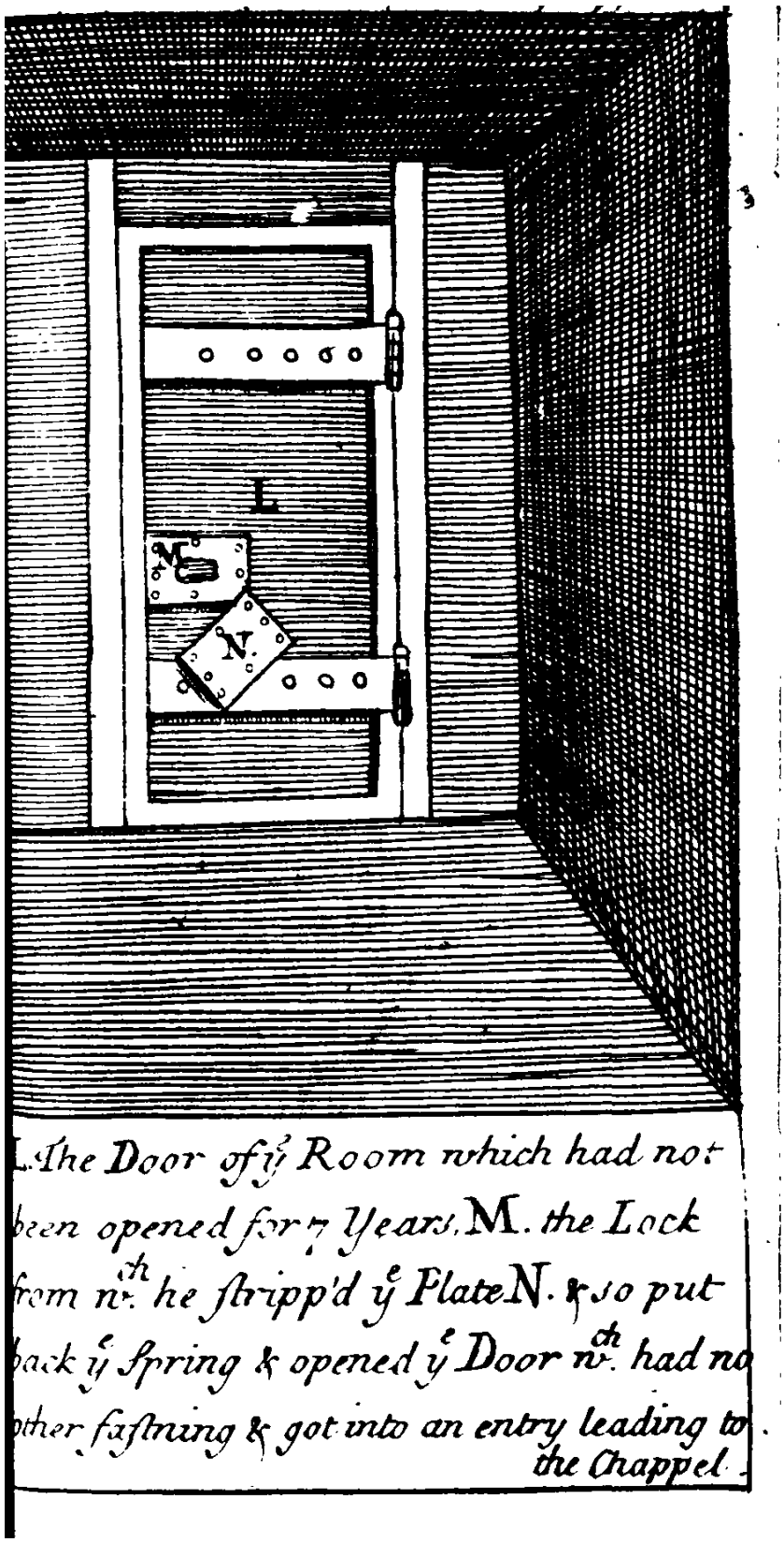


Figure I.1: "The Door of the Room which had not been opened for 7 Years". Engraving. G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724).

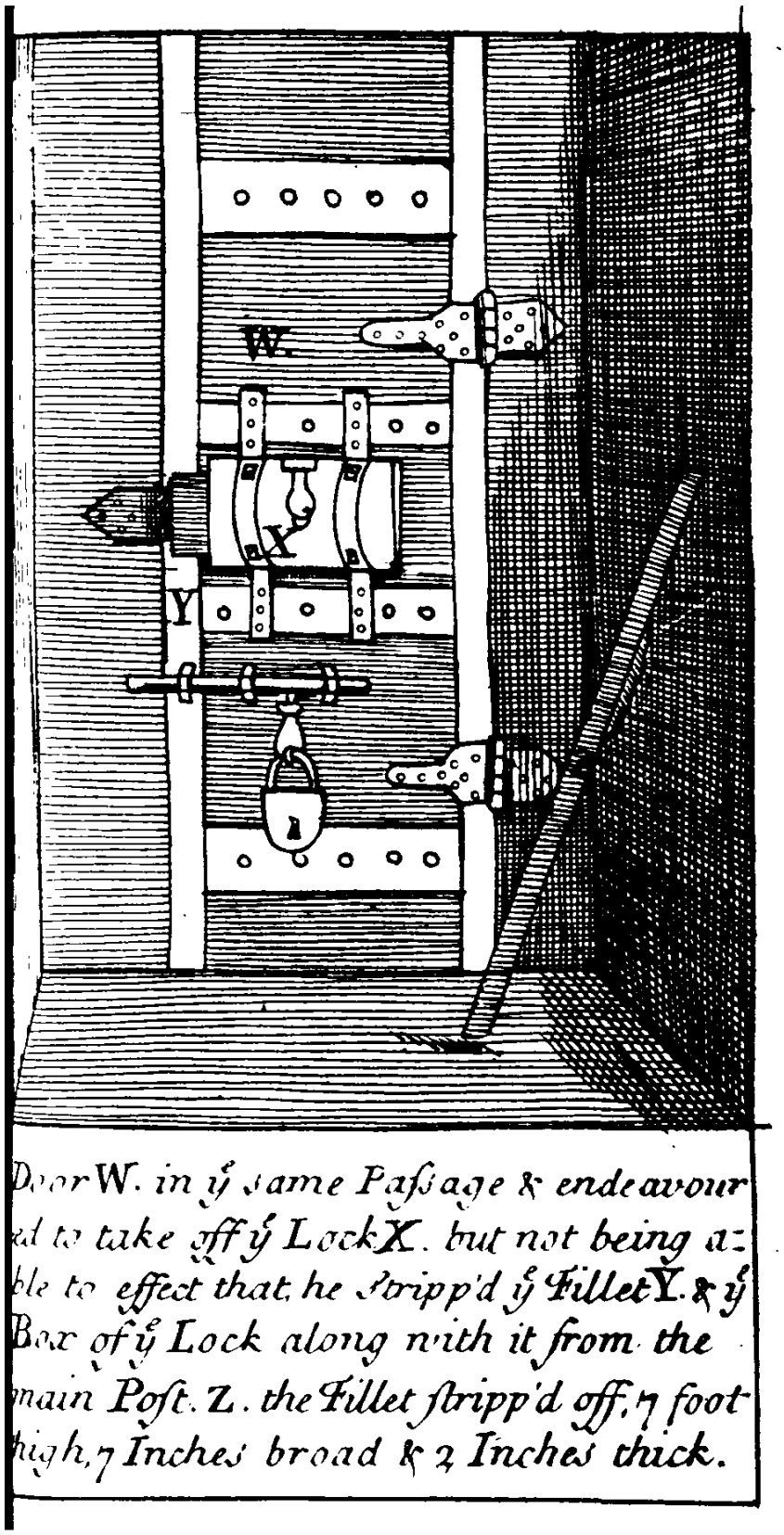


Figure I.2: "Door W". Engraving. G.E., *Authentic Memoirs* (1724).

sufficient to excite the thief's interest. This description furthers the reversal of values operated by the mock-heroic tone of the text, as destruction is turned into smooth displacement. In doing so, it participates in the subversion of the objects of imprisonment present in other accounts of Sheppard's escapes, and highlights the ease with which the housebreaker controls and rejects these objects, as well as their inherent worthlessness.

However, prisoners are not only confined by locks and bars. They also carry a mark of their status in the wearing of fetters. These too prove little constraint to Sheppard, as he is able to carry away those which he could not open, but they do succeed in keeping him under the prisons' authority even after his escape since they advertise his identity as a fugitive. The keepers of Newgate's advertisements in the newspapers thus read: “John Sheppard did break out of Newgate ... with double Irons on his Legs, and Hand-Cuffs on his Hands, with a bright Horse-Lock under his other Irons”.[55] This minute description of Sheppard's chains is followed by that of his physical appearance and clothing. These irons distinguish and hinder Sheppard, designating him as a potentially dangerous fugitive, or a lucrative catch.[56] Unable to remove them before escaping from the condemned hold in Newgate, Sheppard is almost retaken because of his indiscreet irons, despite their being “hid by a Night-Gown”.[57] According to the *British Journal*,

> John Sheppard, who escap'd from the Condemn'd-Hold, …, narrowly miss'd being immediately retaken: The Coachman who carried him to the Water-side, discovering his Fetters as he was getting in the Coach, did, at first, refuse carrying him.[58]

Newgate, in the form of the portable fetters, thus accompanies him even in his flight, and the depictions of the hours following his escape dwell on the physical pain and mental anguish caused by these irons. They prevent him from coming out of hiding as well as

55 *Daily Courant*, Oct. 20, 1724. The same announcement was published in the *Daily Journal*, Oct. 20, 1724 and the *Evening Post*, Oct. 15-17, 1724.
56 The advertisement offered twenty guineas for catching him, and prosecution for knowingly sheltering him. *Daily Courant*, Oct. 20, 1724.
57 *Daily Journal*, Sept. 1, 1724.
58 *British Journal*, Sept. 19, 1724.

being extremely difficult to remove, and, in the *Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard*, he must part with half his purse in order to tempt someone into helping him, a strong contrast with his earlier resourcefulness.[59] The escapologist may be at large, yet his body is still very much imprisoned in the intimate grasp of "those troublesome Companions",[60] resisting his attempts to break or redefine them.

However, Sheppard is not always burdened by fetters and chains only, as he must carry a very particular type of object in his escape from New Prison: his lover. Another real-life character, Elizabeth Lyon, or Edgeworth Bess, Sheppard's mistress, features in many biographies as the instigator of his downfall, introducing him to the criminal world and pressuring the young apprentice to steal in order to satisfy her expensive tastes.[61] A dangerous seductress, Bess is likened to her animal homonym, becoming a sly "she Lyon",[62] while her whorish ways make her "stick as close to a Man as Ivy doth to the Oak, as long as there is any Sap left"[63] and her masculine demeanour allow her to "often beat [the drunk and quarrelsome Sheppard] into better Temper".[64] The villain of this narrative, Lyon's humanity and femininity are blotted out by metaphors turning her into animals and parasites.

Moreover, her body also becomes object in a very particular setting, as Sheppard attempts to get them both out of prison. Having sawn off one of the bars of the prison's window, the couple must descend the twenty feet which separate them from the ground. While Sheppard is represented as actively organising this escape, Bess mutely follows his

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59 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 23-26.
60 *A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard* (1724), 26.
61 Later biographies, and in particular those inspired by Captain Johnson's account of Sheppard, replace Lyon with another prostitute named Maggot, Bess only remaining as one of Sheppard's early love interests. "The Life of John Shepherd" *JGHL34*, 461.
62 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 3.
63 "The Life of Jack Sheppard, &c." *ERR25* (unnumbered [106]) This sentiment is repeated in *HLA5:* "for you must note a Whore sticks as close as Birdlime to a Man, while he has any Thing to give her." "The Life of John Sheppard" *HLA25*, 121.
64 "The Life of John Shepherd" *JGHL34*, 461.

instructions, proving herself a burden for the light and agile thief. *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard* describes their escape in the following manner: “he mounts his Bagage, and in less than ten Minutes carries both her and himself over this Wall, and compleats an entire Escape”.[65] Not only is Bess denied any active part in the action, the play on the word baggage – which, according to the *OED,* can designate not only “a worthless good-for nothing woman; a woman of disreputable or immoral life, a strumpet”, but also “portable property; luggage” – treats her as a heavy and cumbersome object. She slows Sheppard down, as, “she being more corpulent than himself, it was with great Pain and Difficulty that he got her through the Interval”.[66]

Sheppard thus breaks out of prison by destroying, redefining and taking control of the objects supposed to keep him in, underlining their inadequacy when faced with such a resolute felon. However, these obstacles are not the only objects present in his cell, as a steady supply of tools stubbornly insists on appearing in spite of his jailors' scrutiny. These tools are employed in a constant show of support and undermining of the court's sentence from the outside. The only objects that Sheppard owns, they are either given to him by sympathetic visitors and fellow prisoners or already present in his cell, and are instrumental to his escapes. However, these tools are often considered as insufficient until Sheppard endows them with his skills, which create new functions for these instruments. In the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard*, his very first escape is achieved “by only the help of a Razor, and the Stretcher of a Chair, [with which] he broke open the Top of the Round house”.[67] Sheppard's commanding powers over the material world allow him to use seemingly innocuous objects in order to breach the prison wall, as he stretches

65 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 10.
66 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 9.
67 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 7.

their use to previously unseen (by his gaolers, at least) dimensions.

However, this ability is not simply described as a matter of unusual skills and effort. His use of his tools, as well as his escapes, are also described as close to supernatural.[68] When they find him walking free in his cell, Sheppard's stupefied jailors get him to repeat his seemingly impossible feat. The London newspapers thus report:

> they searched him from Head to Foot, and found not so much as a Pin, and when they had chain'd him down again, [they] intreated him to discover by what Magick Art he had thus got himself from the staples, he reach'd forth his Hand, and took up a Nail, and with that and no other Instrument unlock'd himself again before their Faces![69]

Turning the nail into a key, his lock-picking skill is presented as spectacular, or even magical. This sensational aspect of his powers of escapology is also present in pictorial representations of Sheppard. Although many different pictures and portraits were produced, some of which attempted to explain and underplay Sheppard's ability to escape by presenting detailed technical drawings of his tools and methods (see figure I), the most common representation of the thief shows him chained to the floor in Newgate Castle, the horse padlock which fixed his fetters to the ground occupying the foreground.[70] These illustrations often grotesquely emphasise this padlock, a fitting representative for all of Newgate's strong walls, locks, bars and chains (see figure II). However, the addition of a broken down chimney in the background of many of these pictures serves to remind their audience that, despite its size, this seemingly unbreakable padlock cannot, and will not, keep Sheppard chained down. They here foretell the escapist's destruction of this very same chimney in his next jailbreak from the Castle, and effectively invalidate the power of

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68 In G.E.'s *Authentick Memoirs*, 31, he is compared to Fortunatus, Dekker's lucky hero whose magic cap can immediately and invisibly transport him wherever he wishes to go. Thomas Dekker, *The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus: As it was Plaied Before the Queenes Maiestie this Christmas, By the Right Honourable the Earle Of Nottingham, Lord High Admirall of England his Seruants* (London: Printed by S. S for William Aspley, dwelling in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Tygers head, 1600).

69 *Daily Journal*, Oct. 9, 1724. That same article was also published in both the *Evening Post*, Oct. 8-10, 1724, and the *Weekly Journal*, Oct. 10, 1724.

70 See for example the engravings accompanying “The Life of John Shepherd” *JGHL34*, *MR79*, or Thurmond, *Harlequin Sheppard* (1724).

Figure II: Sheppard chained in the Castle.

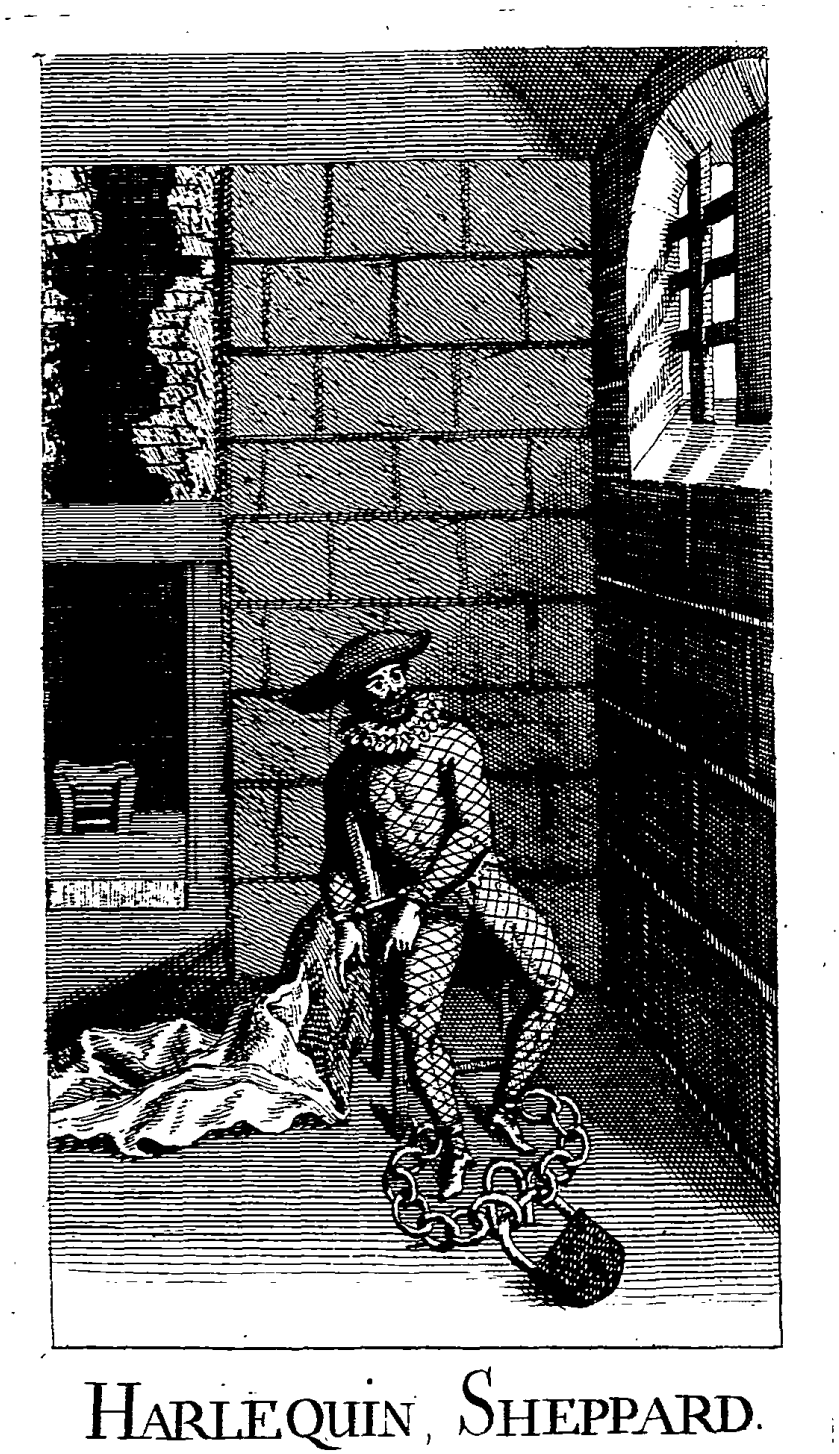


Figure II.1: "Frontispiece". Engraving. Thurmond, *Harlequin Sheppard* (1724).



Figure II.2: "Shepherd in the Stone Room in Newgate." Engraving. *JGHL34.*

the fetters and padlock, announcing instead his next spectacular escape. Sheppard's abilities are thus constructed as almost supernatural, a notion further highlighted by Sheppard's alleged response to the remonstrating clergyman come to visit him in his cell in *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard*: “one File's worth all the Bibles in the World”.[71] Impossible to imprison, Sheppard the trickster continuously mocks and overcomes the obstacles thrown in his way by the representatives of the law, in a living embodiment of a Harlequinade.[72]

However, this supernatural assessment of Sheppard's abilities can also be seen as contributing to the comedic treatment of the relationship between fools and trickster, as Sheppard cons his gullible jailors into a false sense of security for readers already familiar with the mechanics of his tricks. Sheppard's skills are only supernatural to his gaolers, whose inability to contain him are commented upon as much as the escapologist's art. The more sober, and often self-deprecating, voice of the *Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* thus tempers supernatural assessments of Sheppard's abilities. The first-person narration in the voice of Sheppard describes his feat in the following manner: “I spy'd a small Nail within Reach, and with that … I found the great Horse Padlock that went from the Chain to the Staple in the Floor might be unlock'd …. [T]here is scarce a Smith in London but may easily do the same thing”.[73] Although his escapes remain spectacular, Sheppard debunks the claim to supernatural abilities which can only be taken at face value by a foolish and unknowing audience.

Sheppard thus gains and maintain his agency by controlling and redefining the things around him. However, one particular class of objects constantly eludes his control:

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71 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 50.

72 In the eighteenth-century 'Harlequinade', Harlequin was famously able to evade the authoritarian figures' pursuit, as well as magically transform objects with his bat. David Mayer, “Pantomime, British” *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), a similarity which is fully exploited in Thurmond's *Harlequin Sheppard.*

73 *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* (1724), 17.

firearms. Although he owns several pistols, he is always prevented from making use of them, either by the circumstances of his arrest, or by the weapon failing him. In the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard,* Jonathan Wild's man, Quilt Arnold, intends to apprehend him. Sheppard attempts, and fails, to shoot him: “he clapt a loaded Pistol to Quilt's Breast, and attempted to shoot him, but the Pistol miss'd fire”.[74] G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard* altogether mocks Sheppard's inability to control his weapon, disguising a violent fight as a courteous exchange of gifts: “he snapp'd a loaded Pistol, and design'd the Present of the Plumb that was in it for Arnold, for his good Intentions. Arnold thank'd him, as much as if had accepted it, and secur'd him, without any further Risque”.[75] This inefficiency of firearms is even recognised by the first-person narrator of the *Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard*: he comments that, on his final arrest, he “had but two Second-hand Pistols scarce worth carrying about [him]”.[76] Sheppard's inability to make use of these objects is painfully highlighted by the contrast offered by his nemesis, Jonathan Wild, whose firearms are represented, in the *Quaker's Opera*, as his main tool, and his adept use of them as a source of his reputation as a thief-taker: Wild boasts of “My old Pistols … and my Favourite here, the Arm-pit Pistol. Oh this dear little Rogue, he makes my Pot boil, he does more Execution than a great Cannon”.[77] Pistols are nothing but uncontrollable things for Sheppard, who fails at ever using them effectually, unlike Wild, who has made them the primary instruments of his livelihood. Disarmed and unable to commit serious violence, Sheppard is only a threat to objects and property, unlike the more menacing figures of both Blueskin and Wild.

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74 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 14.
75 G.E., *Authentick Memoirs* (1724), 18.
76 *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* (1724), 29.
77 *The Quaker's Opera, As it is Perform'd at Lee's and Harper's Great Theatrical Booth in Bartholomew-Fair* (1728), 5.

Sheppard's use of the objects of imprisonment erodes the institutions of justice and punishment. As he appropriates them through either skill or with the almost supernatural help of illegal and seemingly inappropriate tools, he makes light not only of the obstacles which they throw in his way and thus questions their power, but also of their very principles and justifications. As Sheppard gains fame and popular support, he increasingly refuses to observe the decrees of laws and justice, both as criminal and prisoner. Technical explanations, and hence containment of the insubordination and resistance against legal order represented by his escapes, are as necessary as his execution. They allow the judicial system to regain its agency, temporarily suspended by Sheppard's game of rob-thief, and frame the thieves' exciting feats within a familiar tale of corruption and punishment.

III.3 Costume and disguise

Although they play an important part in his escapes, since Sheppard relies on a series of disguises to avoid recognition when he is a fugitive, aspects of dress only play a very secondary role in both pictorial and textual representations of John Sheppard. The engravings showing him in the Castle dress him in a neutral manner, discarding the specificities of Sheppard's butcher costume: the wide butcher apron appears in none of the pictures, although he retains its less-specialised coat and hat. The texts published after his execution lose almost all interest in describing his attire, which was more evident in newspapers articles and early biographies. This early interest lay in identification purposes: following his escape, and in the absence of an organised police force, the keepers of Newgate had to rely on the public's involvement to recover their prisoner by recognising him from description. The advertisement which they published in the London papers thus reads:

> He is about 22 Years old, about five Foot four Inches high, very slender, of a pale Complexion, has an Impediment, or Hesitation in his Speech, and did

> wear a Butcher's blue Frock, with a great Coat over it, and is a Carpenter, or House-Joyner by Trade.[78]

Clothing is important in aiding his identification and indeed, in his escapes from Newgate, he first passes as a butcher after breaking out from the condemned hold, but he later disguises himself as a beggar in order to safely travel around London. The transformation from butcher to beggar is easily achieved, only requiring some depredation of an otherwise commonplace outfit. According to the *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard*, Sheppard "had tyed an [sic] Handkerchief about [his] Head, tore [his] woollen cap in many places, as likewise [his] Coat and Stockings, and look'd exactly like what [he] designed to represent, a Beggar-Fellow".[79] Degrading his social status to its lowest point with this change in appearance, Sheppard effortlessly avoids recognition and mingles with those who were to become his most vocal supporters, the London lower classes. However, sartorial transitions from one social status to the next do not always go so smoothly, as Sheppard discovers later in the *Narrative*, when, "from a Carpenter and Butcher[, he] was ... transform'd into a perfect Gentleman".[80]

Attempting to upgrade to a higher social class proves fatal to the fugitive. Although he is able to alter his sartorial appearance in order to impersonate a different member of his own class, the carpenter's flamboyant attempt at upper class style directly leads to his arrest. Losing all sense of precaution, Sheppard is represented as rakishly enjoying his popularity amongst his peers, dressed to look the part. The *Evening Post* describes his attire during his last arrest thus:

> He was equip'd every way like a Gentleman, having on a Wig worth about six or seven Guineas, a Diamond Ring on his Finger, a Watch and Snuff-Box in his pocket, and some Gold, being also dress'd in a Suit of Black having furnish'd himself therewith ... by breaking open a Pawnbroker's Shop in Drury

78 *Daily Courant*, Oct. 20, 1724. The same announcement was published in the *Daily Journal*, Oct. 20, 1724 and the *Evening Post*, Oct. 15-17, 1724.
79 *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* (1724), 26.
80 *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* (1724), 28.

> Lane.[81]

This last flamboyant appearance leads him back to prison, as he is then recognised and arrested, too intoxicated to offer any resistance. In addition to the sheer value of his stolen apparel, it is Sheppard's sartorial, as well as social, ambitions which are scrutinised. He is recognisable to the reader as a generic type (just as he is recognised as an escaped criminal in the narratives of his life): that of the resilient and familiar image of a vain and somewhat ridiculous aspirant beau, performing his fake gentility in the sordid world of Drury Lane. This was an image which reappeared in the pages of a large number of his biographies throughout the eighteenth century. It first appears in the *History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes*, even though it was published days before his last arrest. In the course of one of his robberies, Sheppard steals

> a Padesuoy[82] Suit of Cloaths, worth about eighteenth or twenty Pounds more; which having been made for a Corpulent Gentleman, Sheppard had them reduc'd, and fitted for his own Size and Wear, as designing to Appear and make a Figure among the *Beau Monde*.[83]

Not only is Sheppard physically unable to fill a gentleman's shoes without major alterations, because his slight build, his sartorial pretences are also more generally dismissed, as, even with a suitable garb, he would not be able to perform in a refined circle, and remains rooted within the criminal world. Philip Rawlings comments that this act "actually reveals the shallowness of his power".[84] His show of sophistication is confined to an audience of prostitutes and pickpockets, in which he "[struts] about in a fine Suit of Black",[85] providing his brother and fellow housebreaker with fine clothes, "that the

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81 *Evening Post*, Oct. 31-Nov.3, 1724. This article was also reproduced in the *Weekly Journal*, Nov. 7, 1724.

82 Paduasoy, a "strong, rich, silk fabric, usually slightly corded or embossed, popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries" (*OED*).

83 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 11.

84 Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices*, 41.

85 "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35*, I:443-44.

young Man might not appear among the Damsels of Drury unbecoming Mr. Shepherd's Brother",[86] and finally being "seiz'd, upon Suspicion, for a Pyrate, and hoisting up false Colours".[87] While Sheppard's disguises as members of his own class are reasonably successful, and are presented in a neutral manner, his sartorial attempts at gentility are not only ridiculed, but also lead to his demise, as he fails to appropriate upper-class garments convincingly, and is ultimately arrested in a mortifying manner.

Sheppard's failure at manipulating the objects of the upper class puts an end to his streak of escapes. Under constant watch, he is denied any control or agency, while his fetters, portable representatives of his imprisonment, are now part of his final costume, as they become "a heavy pair of Boots", and he must make "his exit in a pair of well-polish'd Handcuffs, instead of a White pair of Gloves".[88] Exposed by his gentleman's disguise, he is given new accessories, which keep him in the power of the law, as his last attempt is foiled by the presence of the manacles even in the cart leading him to Tyburn,[89] and his last costume determined by the physical effect of hanging: "well, comfort thy self, a couple of Kicks, a Shrug, a wry Neck, and a p--ss'd Pair of Breeches will make thee snug and easy".[90]

III.4 Anatomising Sheppard

The biographies on Sheppard show him as belonging to a very particular world: the London professional criminal circles, sheltering thieves, prostitutes and gamesters, kept together through a shared relationship with objects, as well as a secret language, cant. They lack the resources, influence, and status and differentiated from other more dishonest (and

86 "The Life of the famous John Shepherd, Foot-Pad, House-Breaker, and Prison-Breaker" *LMRC35*, I:376.
87 G.E., *Authentick Memoirs* (1724), 63.
88 G.E., *Authentick Memoirs* (1724), 53 & 67.
89 He had hoped to cut the ropes which usually tied the hands of the condemned felons on the voyage to Tyburn, and disappear into the crowd. His jailors had however decided on unusual security measures, and he remained shackled in the cart.
90 "Letter from Sheppard to Blueskin" *Daily Journal*, Oct. 30, 1724.

socially favoured) criminals. The musical and dancing entertainment *Harlequin Sheppard* thus addresses Sheppard's confederates in a rendition of the ballad *Newgate's Garland*:

> Ye Fellows of Newgate whose Fingers are nice,
> In diving in Pockets, or cogging of Dice,
> Ye Sharpers so rich, who can buy off the Noose,
> Ye honest poor Rogues, who die in your Shoes.[91]

Sheppard's world of thieves and cheats is destined for Newgate and Tyburn, unlike that of more genteel and affluent rogues. Leading straight to the gallows, Sheppard's influence is pernicious, as he is represented in a too positive light in entertainments available to the lower classes. Such anxieties underline the class-divided difference in opinion about the housebreaker, who, although he clearly belongs to the criminal world, primarily belongs to the lower orders, and is only a real threat to the propertied class. An explicit parallel is drawn with John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* in a pamphlet examining the causes of London crimes, Andrew Moreton's *Second Thoughts are best*:

> Not content with the Mischief done by the *Beggar's Opera*, we must have a *Quaker's Opera* forsooth of much more evil Tendency than the Former; for in this Jack Shepherd is made the Hero of the Drama, … and many unwary Persons so charm'd with his Appearance on the Stage, drest in that elegant Manner, and his Pockets so well lin'd, they have forthwith commenc'd Street-Robbers or House-breakers; so that every idle Fellow, weary of honest Labour, need but fancy himself a Macheath or a Shepherd, and there's a Rogue made at once.[92]

Portraying a real-life and famous thief as a hero, whose ultimate punishment is not even part of the play,[93] positive or even admiring representations of criminality such as that contained in the *Quaker's Opera* appear to endorse criminality as a tempting alternative to hard labour. Even after Sheppard has been executed, his memory lives on through cheap

91 Thurmond, *Harlequin Sheppard* (1724), 16.

92 Andrew Moreton, *Second Thoughts are best: or, a Further Improvement of a Late Scheme to prevent Street Robberies: By which our Streets will be so strongly guarded, and so gloriously illuminated, that any part of London will be as safe and pleasant at Midnight as at Noonday; and Burglary totally impracticable...* (London: Printed for W. Meadows, at the Angel in Cornhil; and sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1729), 3-4. This pamphlet has been attributed to Daniel Defoe in Chalmer's 1790 *Life of Daniel Defoe*.(London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1790) already, an attribution which is not disputed.

93 Unlike the *Beggar's Opera*, where Macheath is only spared his just punishment because “strict poetical Justice … is manifestly wrong, for an Opera must end happily.” John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (London: Printed for John Watts, at the Printing Office in Wild Court, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, 1728), III:16.

pamphlets, plays and ballads, and is represented in form of entertainment accessible to the illiterate and the unpropertied: the theatre.

Even before his execution, Sheppard had become an entertainment. Stealing himself from the gaol through his escapes, and unable to present himself dramatically on the stage of the London streets without becoming vulnerable to rearrest, he is already represented as property of Newgate, a lucrative exhibition which is repeatedly returned to its owners. From the time of his sentence, which effectively designates him as belonging to his jailors, and ultimately, to the executioner, Sheppard himself takes on the status of a thing, to be gawked at by curious visitors, as exotic and alien as ostriches and lion cubs: the *Daily Journal* comments:"The Country People as come to London flock daily to see three great Curiosities as this Town at present affords, viz. The two young Lyons stuff'd at the Tower; the Ostrich at Ludgate-Hill; and the famous John Sheppard in Newgate".[94] Exposed to the public gaze, Sheppard is exhibited heavily chained, effectively caged, in a mortifying show meant to display the power of the law. The *Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* thus describes him crying: "I had been made a publick Spectacle for many Days together, with my Legs chain'd together, loaded with heavy Irons, and stapled down to the Floor".[95] This exhibition is however subverted by the thief's reported wit. He is represented as actively participating and appropriating the show, the heavy chains supposed to contain him reduced to a mere prop: having described how he removes his fetters, and is discovered by his goalers, *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* has him explain that "he hoped there was no harm in what he had done, since he never did it, till after they had made the most of shewing him".[96]

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94 *Daily Journal*, Nov. 4, 1724.
95 *A Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* (1724), 16.
96 *The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard, Containing a Particular Account of His Many Robberies and Escapes* (1724), 136.

The final act of theatre in which Sheppard appeared in his own person was of course his execution. It attracted, the newspapers report, one of the largest crowds ever seen at Tyburn. It also led to a riot, which, although it features heavily in journalistic accounts, is rarely mentioned by biographies which tend to use the final execution as a fitting conclusion to the criminal's life.[97] The *Daily Journal* reports that,

> A Bailiff ... having procured the Body of John Sheppard, ... with a sinister Design, and thereby frustrating the Preparations of his real Friends, for burying him in a decent Manner; the same occasion'd a great Riot …. A strong Guard came immediately … and the Body of Sheppard was … interr'd …, the Guards marching on each Side of the Coach …. The Mob express'd great Satisfaction when they saw him buried, tho' they had bruised his Body in a Shameful manner at Tyburn, in pulling it to and fro, in endeavouring to rescue it from the Surgeons.[98]

Riots against the surgeons attempting to secure valuable dead bodies for dissection were rather common. Peter Linebaugh, in his article focusing on such riots, explains that "[executions] were the only authorized sources for getting corpses in London, and they permitted a maximum of ten corpses a year".[99] The growing interest in anatomy required a much larger number of corpses, which the surgeons could attempt to procure by purchasing the corpse from the executioner, or from the soon-to-be-hanged criminal himself. However, such a fate was dreaded by many, as, in the words of J.M. Beattie, "dissection was perhaps the greatest indignity that might befall a condemned man",[100] and from which the family and friends of the condemned often tried to rescue them.

Previously only symbolically property of the prison, Sheppard's dead body has become an object to own, as its lucrative potential has survived the thief. For Peter Linebaugh, "we can find in the early eighteenth century a significant change in attitude

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97 One exception is G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard*, which makes the most of the riot and struggle for Sheppard's body to take a dig at a rival printer, Applebee, who is allegedly pelted "with Dirt and Stones" by the mob, who mistook him for one of the surgeon attempting to secure Sheppard's body. G.E., *Authentick Memoirs* (1724), 69.

98 *Daily Journal*, Nov. 18, 1724. The same article was also printed in the *British Journal*, Nov. 21, 1724.

99 Peter Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons", in Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 71.

100 Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 528.

towards the dead human body. The corpse becomes a commodity with all the attributes of a property. It could be owned privately. It could be bought and sold".[101] Through the process of execution, Sheppard has himself become a thing, over which several interested parties must fight for possession, often damaging it in this frenzy for ownership: G.E.'s *Authentic Memoirs of the Life and Surprising Adventures of John Sheppard* comments with irony that Sheppard "was cut down by a Soldier, and delivered as 'tis thought, Alive, but 'tis suppos'd very Faint, into the Hands of his Friends, who hugg'd him about with so much preposterous Love, that in all Probability, they kill'd him with Kindness".[102] The pamphlet *Sheppard in Aegypt* has the criminal comment from beyond the grave that "the stupid Rabble (though all my friends) did so worry about my poor Carcass, to preserve it from the Surgeons, that they almost disjointed me".[103] Killed, not by the hanging, but by the struggle for control over his body turned object, Sheppard's death completes his transformation into a thing. Previously owned by the prison and the law, he narrowly avoids becoming the surgeons' property.

Finally executed and buried, Sheppard enters a world of material representations, occupying textual and pictorial spaces, as pamphlets, biographies and engravings about him are advertised in great numbers from the day of his execution. An advertising stunt devised by Applebee, designating the *Narrative of all the Robberies and Escapes of John Sheppard* as the escapist's official biography, publicly endorsed the version of events presented by the first-person narration in the voice of Sheppard himself. The escapist thus makes a public entrance into the printed world:

> he sent for Mr. Applebee, a Printer, into the Cart, and in the View of several Thousands of People, delivered to him a printed Pamphlet, *Entitled, a Narrative* .... N.B. The said Narrative is now publish'd by John Applebee, Printer, in Black Fryers. And sold by the Booksellers of London and

101 Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot", in Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 72.
102 G.E., *Authentick Memoirs*, 68.
103 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead. Being a Letter from John Sheppard to Frisky Moll, and his Executor* (1725), 2.

Westminster.[104]

By this last act, Sheppard endows this object with a deeper signification, boosting its sales as a result. His literary remains are multiple, and take on a special importance. In *Sheppard in Aegypt,* Sheppard is shown as commenting from the grave on his alleged hope that, should he be cut down early enough, he might have been revived. The executed thief laments that no help was provided as he "had come down Matter for a Six-penny Pamphlet, besides a Sheet and half, and the Presses all at Work".[105] His worth as a subject of cheap literature surpassing that of his life, Sheppard becomes a form of entertainment.

However, Sheppard's fame is not limited to cheap literature only. Following his execution and reports of the presence in Sheppard's cell of Sir James Thornhill, history and sergeant painter to the king, a poem is written celebrating the artist's work:

> *To Sir James Thornhill, on his Picture of John Sheppard:*
> Sheppard is now secur'd at last:
> Thornhill has fix'd the felon fast.
> Oft tho' he loos'd himself before,
> The slippery Rogue escapes no more.
>
> Thornhill, 'tis thine to gild with Fame
> Th'obscure, and raise the humble Name;
> To make the Form elude the Grave;
> And Sheppard from Oblivion save.
>
> Tho' Life in vain the Wretch implores
> An Exile on the farthest Shores,
> Thy Pencil brings a kind Reprieve,
> And bids the dying Robber live.[106]

Thornhill's portrait has thus two functions. On the one hand, it finally and securely contains the famous escapist. On the other hand, it grants the executed thief a second life, as he survives in this (now ironically lost) portrait, while elevating his fame from its

104 *Daily Journal,* Nov. 17, 1724.

105 *Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead. Being a Letter from John Sheppard to Frisky Moll, and his Executor* (1725), 2.

106 *The British Journal*, Nov. 28, 1724. This poem was also reproduced in "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35*, I:445, as well as many of the biographies influenced by that account. A longer version was also published in *A Present for a Young Lady. Containing a Variety of Poems, Songs, Epigrams, &c. By Several Eminent Hands*. *Particularly, the D— of W—n, Dr. Garth, Dean S—t, Mr. John Hughs, Mr. Thompson, Mrs C—r* (London: printed for Jacob Robinson, 1743), 199-200.

popular roots. While the pamphlets, ballads and half-sheet which were sold following his execution play on lower-class attractions and middling-class anxieties, Thornhill's portrait effectively subdues the escapist's power of self-representation, containing him and turning him into a valuable object himself.

Sheppard's materiality is thus appropriated in different forms, from his physical body to his financial and aesthetic afterlife. *Select Trials … at the Session-House in the Old Bailey*, however, features a final appropriation, on the spiritual level: its narrator incredulously states that "what is yet more, Jack's Adventures have been spiritualized in the Pulpit; if a late Friend of mine was not in Jest when he told me the story".[107] The reproduction of a sermon with Sheppard as the crux of its argument follows. It uses the ambivalence of his reputation to prompt the congregation to embrace God and escape from the prisons of evil, a parable constructed upon the corporality of escape and which ultimately rejects Sheppard's own physicality, as the objects of imprisonment are turned into spiritual metaphors:

> what astonishing Things has he perform'd for the Sake of a stinking miserable Carcass! … Let me exhort ye then to open the Locks of your Hearts with the Nail of Repentance; burst asunder the Fetters of your beloved Lusts; mount the Chimney of Hope, take from thence the Bar of good Resolution, break thro' the Stone Wall of Despair, and all the Strong Holds in the dark Entry of the Valley of the Shadow of Death: Raise yourselves to the Leads of Divine Meditation. Fix the Blanket of Faith with the Spike of the Church. Let yourselves down to the Turner's House of Resignation, and descend the Stairs of Humility: so shall you come to the Door of Deliverance from the Prison of Iniquity, and escape the Clutches of that old Executioner the Devil, who goeth about like a roaring Lion, seeking whom he may devour.[108]

107 "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35*, I:445.
108 "John Sheppard, for Burglaries. August 1724" *ST35*, I:446.

IV - "Advertisements were daily cramm'd into the publick News Papers, calling loudly out for all Sorts of Strayed Valuables":[1] Jonathan Wild

Arguably one of the most famous criminals of the eighteenth century, Jonathan Wild made his mark on London criminal circles and practices and became something of a byword for satirical representations of venal and unscrupulous public officials. His career as an incredibly successful thief taker, fence and gang leader was documented in the Old Bailey's archives, which feature him in over forty trial accounts between 1716 and 1725. The London newspapers were also littered with articles reporting his law-enforcement activities, and published his advertisements for lost or stolen goods, to be reunited with their lawful owners for a fee and no questions asked.[2] His execution in May 1725 spurred the production of a large number of pamphlets, ballads and biographies, and the corrupt thief taker soon entered the realms of fiction in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728) and Henry Fielding's *Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743). The first biography entirely dedicated to the thief-catcher, the *Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild* (1725),[3] was published before his trial, as he remained in custody in Newgate. Prior to this, Wild featured in a number of texts following the lives of some of the felons he sent to the gallows, such as *Newgate's Garland*,[4] a ballad sometimes attributed to John Gay, and which was included in John Thurmond's danced entertainment on John Sheppard's spectacular escapes.[5] In addition, Wild himself commissioned a pamphlet, *An Answer to A*

1 *An Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild, (Citizen and Thief-Taker of London) With the Crimes he stands charg'd with, upon a Commitment sign'd by Twelve of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace...* (London: Printed by A. Moore, near St. Paul's, and Sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1725), 18.

2 He is mentioned in well over 500 newspaper articles between 1714 and the end of the century. Of these, about 200 were advertisements for lost or stolen goods. See figure III.

3 *An Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild, (Citizen and Thief-Taker of London)…* (1725).

4 *Newgate's Garland: Being, a New Ballad, Shewing, how Mr. Jonathan Wild's Throat was cut from Ear to Ear* (1724). Wild never appears alive on scene.

5 Thurmond, *Harlequin Sheppard* (1724).

late Insolent Libel, Entituled [sic], A Discovery of the Conduct of Receivers and Thief-Takers, in and about the City of London (1718)[6] in response to an attack by his former employer and rival, City Marshall Charles Hitchen, which appeared in *The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London* (1718).[7]

Six further Wild biographies were published in 1725. Two of these were later attributed to Daniel Defoe: *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* and *The Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death… By H.D. late Clerk to Justice R----*.[8] The latter was the most influential, and its contents are found in a number of later biographies, such as the 1725 *Life and Villainous Actions Of that Notorious Offender, Jonathan Wild*,[9] which reproduces its text excluding some anecdotes.[10] Some of its contents are also found in Henry Fielding's mock-heroic account of Wild's life. One additional 1725 biography, *The Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and*

6 *An Answer to A late Insolent Libel, Entituled [sic], A Discovery of the Conduct of Receivers and Thief-Takers, in and about the City of London; presumptuously Dedicated to the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council. Written by C---s H---n. … Set forth in several Entertaining Stories, Comical Intrigues, merry Adventures, particularly of the M---l and his Man the Buckle-maker. With a Diverting Scene of a Sodomitish Academy* (London: Printed for Tho. Warner, at the Black-Boy in Paternoster-Row, 1718).

7 *The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London. With the Thief-Takers Proclamation. Also An Account of all the Flash Words now in Vogue amongst the Thieves; with an Explanation of each Word. ... By a Prisoner in Newgate* (London: Printed for T. Warner, at the Black Boy in Pater-Noster-Row, 1718).

8 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild; Not made up of Fiction and Fable, but taken from his Own Mouth, and collected from Papers of his Own Writing* (London: Printed and Sold by John Applebee, in Black-Fryers; J. Isted at the Golden-Ball near Chancery-Lane in Fleet-street; and the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1725) & H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death. Containing His Rise and Progress in Roguery; his first Acquaintance with Thieves; ... In which all his Intrigues, Plots and Artifices are accounted for, and laid open. Intermix'd with Variety of diverting Stories, By H.D. late Clerk to Justice R----* (London: Printed for T. Warner, at the Black Boy in Pater-noster-Row, 1725). Both attributions have been challenged by Furbank & Owens, *Defoe De-Attributions*, 139, and there is some discussion as to the authorship of the *True and Genuine Account* (see Maximillian Novak's *Daniel Defoe : Master of Fictions : His Life and Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 641.

9 *The Life and Villainous Actions Of that Notorious Offender, Jonathan Wild, Who was Executed at Tyburn on Monday the 24th of May last. Containing a full Account of his secret Correspondence with Thieves; the Methods he took to make himself their Head, and his Manner of Governing all Sorts of Thieves* (London: Printed for T. Catesby near the Royal Exchange in Corhill, [1725?]).

10 H.D.'s text was also republished in Northampton as *The Life of Jonathan Wilde, Thief-Taker General of Great-Britain and Ireland. From his Birth to his Death. Containing His Rise and Progress in Roguery; his first Acquaintance with Thieves, by what Arts he made himself their Head, or Governor; his Discipline over them; his Policy and great Cunning in governing them; and the several Classes of Thieves under his Command* (Northampton: Printed by W. Dicey, 1725).

Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde, Generalissimo of the Prig-Forces in Great-Britain and Ireland,[11] also presents his life in a fantastical and mock-heroic fashion. Moreover, the thief-taker features in two collections of criminal lives published that same year, *The History of the Lives and Actions of Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker, Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, Footpad, and John Sheppard, Housebreaker*[12] and *The English Rogue Revived.*[13]

In addition to the *Old Bailey Proceedings*[14] of his trial and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*[15]of his life, Wild's execution also prompted the publication of a number of pamphlets. He features as the archetype of the corrupt thief-taker in Bernard Mandeville's *Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn*,[16] which was composed before Wild's death and contains some materials also found in the *Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild*. He is also one of the three main characters of a short pamphlet, *News from the Dead: or, a Dialogue between Blueskin, Shepperd and Jonathan Wild.*[17] The *View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy*[18] describes his funeral procession in detail as the only noteworthy item in the history of St. Sepulchre's Parish. Finally, Wild was also remembered in *Weighley, alias Wild. A Poem, in Imitation of Hudibras*,[19] which contains a sizeable biography of the thief-taker, mostly adapted from

11 *The Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde, Generalissimo of the Prig-Forces in Great-Britain and Ireland Introduced with the most Memorable Passages in the Lives of his Ancestors; and concluding With his Behaviour in Newgate, And at the Place of Execution. With An Explanation of the most usual Terms of Art in the Canting Dialect* (London: Printed for H. Whitridge, in Searle-street by Lincoln-Inn Back-Gate, 1725).

12 "The Life of Jonathan Wild." *HLA25*, 1-83.

13 "The English Rogue Reviv'd, or the Life and Death of Jonathan Wild." *ERR25* (Unnumbered [8-56]), which was adapted from H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death* (1725).

14 *OBP* May 1725, trial of Jonathan Wilde (t17250513-55).

15 *ONA* May 1725 (OA17250524).

16 B. Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn: and A Proposal for some Regulations concerning Felons in Prison, and the good Effects to be Expected from them. To which is Added, A Discourse on Transportation, and a Method to render that Punishment more Effectual. By B. Mandeville, M.D.* (London: Printed: And Sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1725), 26.This text was first published in serial form in the *British Journal*, Feb. 27 & Mar. 3, 6, 13, 27, 1725.

17 *News from the Dead: or, a Dialogue between Blueskin, Shepperd and Jonathan Wild* [1725?].

18 *A View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy* (London: Sold by T. Warner at the Black-Boy in Pater-noster-Row, and by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1728 [1725?]).

19 N.P., *Weighley, alias Wild. A Poem, in Imitation of Hudibras. To which is annex'd, a more genuine and particular Account in Prose, than any yet publish'd, of the most remarkable Events, and Transactions, of his Life, from the Time of his Birth to his Execution. Also Jonathan's last Farewell and Epitaph, with a Song, never before Printed. By N.P. many Years his intimate Acquaintance* (London: Printed for J.

the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, and newspaper articles.

While Henry Fielding's heavily fictionalised account of the life of the thief-taker was published as the third volume of his *Miscellanies* in 1743,[20] and was later revised and published independently in 1754,[21] Wild also features in collections of criminal lives published throughout the eighteenth century. Alexander Smith thus uses the thief taker's reputation in order to advertise a volume of collected criminal lives, the *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Together with the History and Lives of Modern Rogues* (1726).[22] Charles Johnson also includes Wild in his *General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, &c.* (1734);[23] his biography of the thief-taker was adapted or reproduced in a number of later publications.[24] He used a variety of sources (from the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of his life and trial, to the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild*), and included some original material detailing Wild's business model. Another influential biography was published in the *Select Trials*[25] collection in 1735. Taken from newspaper articles, the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, the *Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild*, as well as long excerpts from the two 1718 pamphlets, it contains colourful additions such as a canting dictionary and a long "Complaint of Jonathan Wild" in verse, and was included in many other collections.[26]

Roberts, near the Oxford-Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1725).

20 Fielding, *Miscellanies.*

21 Fielding, *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1754).

22 "Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, &c." *SMLT26*, 1-25. Wild's biography is mostly adapted from the *Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild* (1725), but also contains some extracts from Mandeville's *Enquiry* (1725), as well as original materials.

23 "The Life of Jonathan Wild." *JGHL34*, 466-472.

24 See for example "The Life of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker." *LMRC35*, II: 14-68, "The Life of Jonathan Wild." *MGTH48*, II: 128-49, "The Life of Jonathan Wild." MGHL58, 311-31, "The Life of Jonathan Wild." *LAMNH59*, 21-41, and "The Account of Jonathan Wild, the Thief-taker, taken from his own Mouth, in the Condemn'd-Hole in Newgate, four Days before his Execution." *SIAL60*, 314-336.

25 "Jonathan Wild, for Felonies. May 1725." *ST35*, II: 44-113.

26 Somewhat shortened and/or rearranged versions can be found in "The Trial of Jonathan Wild, for Felony, with the most remarkable Passages of his Life." *BR64*, II: 339-410, "The Trial of Jonathan Wild, for

Finally, Wild's character is featured in a wide selection of texts such as ballads,[27] political opinion pieces in newspapers, or pamphlets on the state of crime in London.[28] His name is also often used as a shortcut to designate a corrupt and venal official in a variety of genres,[29] and he is considered a direct inspiration for the character of Peachum in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*,[30] one of the great theatrical successes of the eighteenth century, with an initial production running continuously for over two months, and regular performances in the repertory thereafter.[31] His importance as an eighteenth-century figure earns him a place in the satirical *Last Dying Words of the Eighteenth Century. A Pindarick Ode. Giving a humourous and chronological Detail of all the remarkable Events*,

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Felonies; with an Account of his Life and Transactions, and Particulars respecting many other Villains." *TC68*, II: 123-211, "Jonathan Wild, for Felonies, May, 1725." *VANM76*, I: 287-346, and "Jonathan Wild, for Felonies, May, 1725." *MOBC88*, I: 336-376. Finally, the "Particular Account of the Life and Trial of Jonathan Wild; including Genuine Memoirs of his numerous Accomplices." *MR79*, II: 13-84, contains elements from both *ST35* and Johnson's *JGHL34* biographies of Wild, and was itself reproduced in "The Narrative of the Character, Life and Trial of the notorious Jonathan Wild; Including Genuine Memoirs of his numerous Accomplices, and their several Contrivances." *JNCN95*, II: 14-84.

27 See for example *Jonathan Wild's Last Farewell to the World*. Ballad [1725?] or *The Funeral Procession of the Celebrated Mr. Jonathan Wild Thief-Taker General of Great-Britain and Ireland*, a broadsheet published on the day of his execution and which accompanying text, "The Complaint of Jonathan Wild", was reproduced in *ST35*, II:109-110.

28 See for example *The Thief-Catcher; Or, Villainy Detected. Containing An ample Discovery of the many surprising Tricks, Subtilties [sic], and Frauds, now practised by Highwaymen, Street-Robbers, Gamblers, Sweetners, Tickers, Gypsies, Horse-Stealers, Sneaks, Jacobs, Money-changers, Coiners, Traps and Rogues of all Denomination. ... By a Lover of his Country* (London: Printed for W. Owen at Homer's-Head, near Temple-Bar, 1753), or Saunders Welch (High Constable of Holborn and one of Henry Fielding's assistants in Bow Street)'s *Essay upon the Office of Constable. With Rules and Cautions for the most safe and effectual Discharge of that Duty. By Saunders Welsh, Late High-Constable of Holborn-Division; Now One of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex, and for the City and Liberty of Westminster* (London: Printed for C. Henderson under the Royal Exchange, 1758).

29 See for example William Hay's *Select Epigrams of Martial. Translated and Imitated by William Hay, Esq. With An Appendix of some by Cowley, and other Hands* (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1755), or Archibald Campbell, *The Sale of Authors, A Dialogue, In Imitation of Lucian's Sale of Philosophers* (London: Printed and Sold by the Booksellers in London and Westminster, 1767). Wild was also a common figure in opposition satire against Robert Walpole, as parallels are drawn between the allegedly corrupt public official and the scheming thief-taker (see *Mist's Weekly Journal* of June 12th and 19th, 1725, for one of the earliest example of such a juxtaposition).

30 Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728).

31 William A McIntosh, "Handel, Walpole and Gay: The Aims of the *Beggar's Opera*" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7.4 (Summer 1974), 415. Such an inspiration was recognised even as the *Beggar's Opera* was first brought onto the stage. The *Country Journal, or, the Craftsman* (Feb. 17, 1728) thus comments that Jonathan Wild is "represented under the Character of Peachum" in the play, which had debuted on the 29th of January in Lincoln's Inn Field's Theatre Royal, and ran for a record-breaking thirty-two consecutive nights. The *London stage, 1660-1800 . A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-receipts and Contemporary comment* lists over a thousand performances of the play from its debut to the end of the eighteenth century (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1960-1968).

Fashions, Characters, &c. &c. By Andrew Merry, Esq.(1800).[32]

Although the texts focused on Jonathan Wild are often heavily fictionalised, his involvement with the courts and the public nature of his business model means that his life can be traced with a degree of accuracy.[33] He was baptised in Wolverhampton on May 6th, 1683; according to parish records, his father was a joyner. An overwhelming majority of contemporary biographers as well as the pamphlet commissioned by Wild himself in 1718 agree that he was apprenticed to a buckle-maker, and followed this trade in his hometown for a time.[34] While little information exists on his early years, he was most definitely settled in London by 1710, at which time an action for debt was brought against him. He was arrested in March,[35] and spent a number of years in the Wood Street Compter.[36] While eighteenth-century accounts detail his relationship with a prostitute responsible for introducing him to the London underworld, no such character appears in official sources such as the Old Bailey record, nor in the pamphlet commissioned by the thief-taker himself.[37]

By 1714, Wild was already in the business of reuniting, for a fee, lost or stolen items with their owners, and mostly focused on private papers and some clothing. They could be deposited at his house in Cripplegate for a reward and no questions asked.[38] He had moved

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32 Andrew Merry, *The Last Dying Words of the Eighteenth Century. A Pindarick Ode. Giving a humourous and chronological Detail of all the remarkable Events, Fashions, Characters, &c. &c. By Andrew Merry, Esq.* (London: Printed by J. Barker, Great Russell-Street, Covent Garden: for J. Lee, no. 77, Fleet-Street; C. Chappell, no.66, Pall-Mall; and S. Reed, no. 444, Strand, 1800).

33 For an extensively researched (if occasionally too quick to trust Wild's eighteenth-century biographers) study of Jonathan's life, see Gerald Howson's *Thief-Taker General: Jonathan Wild and the Emergence of Crime and Corruption as a Way of Life in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1970).

34 *An Answer to A late Insolent Libel* (1718), 4.

35 Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, 14. The warrants and schedules concerning Wild are available through the London Metropolitan Archive, ref. CLA/047/LJ/17/018/B.

36 *An Answer to A late Insolent Libel*'s preface mentions that Wild spent four years in debtors' prison (ii).

37 Charles Hitchen is first to mention Wild's alleged relationship with prostitute Mary Milliner, whom he protected from irate clients whose pocket she picked before he turned to fencing. See *The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks* (1718), 5. This point in not addressed in Wild's response.

38 See for example the *Daily Courant*, Aug. 23, 1714.

his operations to the Old Bailey by 1715,[39] and soon entered into a partnership with City Marshall Charles Hitchen, who had by then been suspended from office and focused on his wider scale fencing business as well as apprehending felons.[40] The pair had fallen out by 1718, as evidenced by their short paper war. As Wild's success soared, he became a constant presence in the London newspapers through his advertisements for stolen items,[41] as well as news articles detailing his arrests and investigations – his name became so synonymous with law-enforcement that the *Universal Journal* headed its August 1724 crime news section "From Jonathan Wilde's in the Old Bailey".[42]

His reputation earned him the patronage of members of the aristocracy, while his expertise was sought even beyond London.[43] His success relied on his knowledge of the London criminal class, who found it increasingly difficult to monetise their booty when receiving and selling stolen goods became a felony through the *Benefit of Clergy Act* of 1691.[44] He also made a lucrative profession of thief-catching, reaping the sizeable rewards offered to those who apprehended felons. Although the thief-catcher was able to maintain a veneer of legality through a business model of collecting rewards instead of downright selling the stolen objects in his possession, he soon lost his reputation as a law-abiding citizen working for the common good through his overt relationship with, and control of, the London criminal underground. His claim to honesty was still taken at face value by the *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* in 1719. It describes an incident involving Wild and a known highwayman, pursued and killed by the thief-taker, an act for which no legal action

39 *Daily Courant*, Oct. 12, 1715.
40 Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, 55.
41 For an example of such an advertisement, as well as more data on their presence in the London Newspapers, see figure III.2.
42 *Universal Journal*, Aug. 8, 1724.
43 On his wealthy clientele, see for example *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, Nov. 26, 1720; on his influence, see the *Daily Journal*, Nov. 2, 1721 (reproduced in *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, Nov. 4, 1721, and the *London Journal*, Nov. 11, 1721).
44 The law against receiving was strengthened in the first decade of the eighteenth century, and the 1718 *Transportation Act* enabled courts to transport receivers for fourteen years. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 189-90.

was taken against Wild, “it having been thought not reasonable to imprison an Honest Man for killing a Rogue."[45] However, Wild's dubious morals soon became a running joke in accounts of his activities, as newspapers delighted in satirising his hypocrisy: following a housebreaking, “Jonathan Wild was consulted ..., but he, good Man! was pleased to tell those who applyed to him, That he did no Business on the Lord's Day."[46]

Wild's success was built on theft-victims' willingness to pay for the recovery of personal items, such as bills, account books, and other intimate papers or objects. He depended on his deep knowledge and involvement with the London criminal classes, which allowed him to trace these items and the probable perpetrators of the theft. London thieves became his de-facto employees, as they relied on his services to monetise their booty, and unpliable criminals could be disposed of, with a profit, thanks to the monetary rewards offered for bringing them to justice.[47] However, resentment grew among the capital's criminals, and the thief-taker's unpopularity was violently demonstrated by Blueskin's 1724 attack in the Old Bailey courtyard, about which the *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* commented that “honest Jonathan stands a fine Chance among those Rogues."[48]

Wild was however not above the law. The 1718 *Transportation Act* included a number of provisions which were aimed exactly at his type of business, and made

45 *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*, June 17, 1719.

46 *London Journal*, May 5, 1724. The same incident is reported by *Parker's London News or the Impartial Intelligencer*, Apr. 29, 1724, which comments that “Mr. Jonathan Wild ... gave himself an Air, and told them, they must come the next Day; for he would not break the Sabbath, which ought to be a Day of Rest." Wild's religious airs also came under fire during his imprisonment: as the clients whose custom finally brought about the thief-catcher downfall asked “what he must have for himself, he reply'd, Good Woman, I desire nothing of you, for my Part, but your Prayers; which religious Expression, from a Person of his Character, occasion'd some Diversion." *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, and *London Journal*, both May 22, 1725. Wild did at times attempt to refute direct accusations of corruption, going as far as offering rewards for the discovery of his slanderers (see for example the *Daily Post*, Feb. 6, 1725).

47 For a discussion of the legal mechanisms exploited by Wild, see Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, chapter X and XI, 83-101.

48 *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* Oct. 17, 1724. The attack was reported in very similar terms in the *London Journal* of the same day, and the *Evening Post*, Oct. 13-15, 1724. Another thief, Benjamin Branch, is later reported to also have “formed a Design to Murder Jonathan Wild” in the *Daily Journal*, Dec. 5, 1724.

receiving rewards to restore stolen goods without bringing the thief to justice a felony. However, delays in the application of the Act as well as legal complexities relating to proof[49] allowed Wild to circumvent the law and continue his activities well into the 1720s. Nonetheless, he was arrested in February 1725, and tried and executed the following May. His arrest did not originally hinder his activities: the *London Journal* reports that the thief taker "gives his Advice Gratis, if the Robbery appears to have been committed by a private Hand" from Newgate prison.[50] The case for which he was found guilty, which concerned his involvement in the theft of £40 worth of lace from a shop in Holborn, was partially conducted from Newgate as he took a reward and arranged for the restoration of the goods while imprisoned. Wild's defense focused on his past services to the public, including a list of criminals he had brought to justice which he distributed to the jury and the court.[51] As for the shop-owner on whose testimony he was convicted, she received the reward for bringing the criminal to justice "in the same Manner as that for the convicting of Highwaymen."[52]

The Ordinary of Newgate describes Wild's last days as filled with disease and suicidal thoughts.[53] The thief-taker did in fact attempt to kill himself the day before his scheduled execution, but failed as he drank too large a dose of laudanum which caused him to vomit and survive.[54] His trial and execution attracted a great deal of interest, and windows overlooking his route from Newgate to Tyburn were advertised and let for as much as five shillings.[55] His fate garnered little sympathy: the *London Journal* introduces him as the "much talk'd of, but little-pity'd, Jonathan Wild",[56] while the mob cheered and

49 See Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, 96-98.
50 *London Journal*, Mar. 20, 1725.
51 *OBP* (t17250513-55).
52 *Daily Journal*, May 18, 1725.
53 *ONA* (OA17250524).
54 *Daily Post* and *Daily Journal*, both May 25, 1725; *London Journal*, May 29, 1725.
55 *Daily Post*, May 22, 1725.
56 *London Journal*, May 5, 1725. The same report can also be found in the *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* of the same day.

pelted him with stones on his way to the gallows.[57]

Wild's business depended on careful control over not only the stolen items he fenced, but also the thieves he employed, as well as his own life, appearance and reputation. Due to his masterful direction of the the illegal circulation of objects between London's law-abiding and criminal circles, he is depicted as a corrupt mastermind by eighteenth-century biographers, who delight in detailing the often fantastical schemes employed by his thieves to steal anything from plain handkerchiefs to a house's entire contents. The gang-leader thus takes on a powerful, and problematic, role as intermediary between things, objects and their subjects, manipulating both legal and economic systems to his own ends. Turning stolen objects into unrecognisable things, simultaneously severing and reconnecting the link between objects and subjects, Wild also uses his pseudo-legal powers in order to transform living subjects into objects, bodies into things, through incarceration and execution. While criticism of the Wild narratives have mostly focused on the moral, satirical, and mock-heroic aspects of the gang-leader's literary afterlife,[58] this chapter explores Jonathan Wild's peculiar position within eighteenth-century economic, criminal, and literary markets through his particular relationship with the material world. Through the course of his career, the thief-taker is increasingly subject to fictional treatment, culminating in Henry Fielding's 'biography', which, according to his introduction to the *Miscellanies*, consist “rather of such Actions which he might have performed, … than what he really did”.[59] Fictionalised representations of his character materialise anxieties about

57 See for example the *Daily Journal*, May 25, 1725, or the *London Journal*, May 29, 1725.

58 See for example Claude Rawson's “Avatars of Alexander: Jonathan Wild and the Tyrant Thug, from Voltaire to Brecht.” in Claude Rawson (ed). *Henry Fielding (1707-1754). Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate. A Double Anniversary Tribute* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 91-114; Paula McDowell's “Narrative Authority, Critical Complicity: The Case of 'Jonathan Wild'.” *Studies in the Novel* 30:2 (Summer 1998), 211-231; or Allan Wendt's “Moral Allegory of *Jonathan Wild*.” *ELH* 24:4 (Dec. 1957), 306-320.

59 Fielding, *Miscellanies* I:9.

ownership, deceit, and corruption, which are managed through literary, as well as – after his death – very literal, dismemberment. An attention to the association of Wild with the movement and management of material objects reveals that the thief-taker's embodiment of anxieties surrounding changing modes of material production and consumption reflects eighteenth-century concerns about literary property and the role of publishers, biographers, and their biographical subjects.

IV.1 Bric-à-brac

Although Wild's business in stolen objects did at times deal with extremely valuable items, the majority of the objects advertised in the newspapers were not particularly expensive. Instead, their worth was defined by their relationship with their lost owners, as they acquired a personal, rather than pecuniary, value. Such items were difficult to monetise: often easily recognised, their resale value was low, the risk of detection making them an unappealing choice for fences and pawn-shops alike. Wild banked on these difficulties, offering thieves a way to dispose of dangerous booty, and their victims the opportunity to recover valued personal belongings. The advertisements published by Wild and his competitors in the London newspapers list an unending stream of lost and stolen account and pocketbooks, jewelry, snuffboxes, watches, clothing, plate, and miscellaneous personal bills and papers, sometimes to a staggering value – yet inaccessible to anyone but their legitimate owner.[60] Bernard Mandeville discussed the role of the fence and thief-taker in London criminality in a serial essay originally published in the *British Journal* between February and March 1725, at the time of Wild's arrest, and later published independently as the *Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn*. He comments that

> As soon as any Thing is missing, suspected to be stolen, the first Course we

60 See for example Wild's advertisements for three separate stolen pocket books in the *Daily Courant*, Nov. 17, 1720, which contained bills well over £1000 in value. While all payments were stopped, preventing the thief from exchanging them for cash, the theft victims were also unable to receive their due.

> steer is directly to the Office of Mr. Jonathan Wild. If what we want is a Trinket, either enamell'd, or otherwise curiously wrought; if there is Painting about it; if it be a particular Ring, the Gift of a Friend; or any Thing which we esteem above the real Value, and offer more for it than Mr. Thief can make of it, we are look'd upon as good Chaps, and welcome to redeem it. But if it be plain Gold or Silver, we shall hardly see it again, unless we pay the Worth of it.[61]

Stolen items are here separated in two distinct categories: those made of easy to monetise materials, in which case the theft victim is expected to repurchase them at their full value or lose them forever, and those that carry a more personal, intimate worth. Wild's name serves as a byword for those involved in the fencing business, of whom he was the most visible.

Wild's involvement with the first, marketable category was well known, and is featured in the *Beggar's Opera*, when Peachum, Wild's on-stage alter-ego, orders his wife to "rip out the coronets and marks of these dozen of cambric handkerchiefs, for [he] can dispose of them [that] afternoon to a chap in the city."[62] While personal belongings could be reunited, for a fee, with their legitimate owners, altering and reselling stolen objects was also a lucrative disposal method. The resale of stolen goods was hardly unheard of in eighteenth-century London. However, Wild's biographers depict a thoroughly organised operation headed by the thief-taker: the narrator of one of the most influential biographies of Wild, H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death* (1725), thus sarcastically comments that he was "a great Benefactor to Trade; for ... he kept in Pay many artists for the altering of Watches and Rings." After the link between objects and their owning subjects is severed by the act of theft, Wild finalises the separation by modifying the object, turning it into an unrecognisable thing, ready to reenter the market: the same biography observes that "In fine, his Business in all Things was to put a false gloss upon Things."[63] Wild thus exercises final control over the material world; while the

61 Mandeville, *Enquiry* (1725), 3.
62 Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), I:4.
63 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 59 & 58

thief struggles to manipulate objects and their meaning, risking detection and punishment through every step of the theft and disposal of their loot, Wild's authoritarian position allows him to rule over criminal, victim and booty.

In addition to mingling legal trades with criminal endeavours by including tradesmen in his illegal transactions, his dealings are also not limited to Britain. A list of items brought to the magistrates and published in the London newspapers to argue for his continued imprisonment not only include “That he kept in pay several Artists to make Alterations and transform Watches, Seals, Snuff-Boxes, Rings, and other valuable Things”, but also “That he had under his Care and Direction several Warehouses for receiving and concealing stolen Goods, and also a Ship for carrying off Jewels, Watches, and other valuable Goods to Holland, where he hath a superannuated Thief for his Factor.”[64] Wild's system is an global venture, employing trusted former employees to care for his interests abroad, and making stolen belongings entirely irretrievable not only to their former owners, but also to the British market as a whole. Engaging in an altogether illegal business, Wild must ensure that the objects he disposes of become completely unrecognisable things, whose circulation he directs from the apparent legality of his London office.

While the sale of stolen objects was prohibited, accepting rewards for reuniting stolen items with their owners was rarely prosecuted. Provided the fence had no direct involvement with the transaction, it was notoriously difficult to find proof to bring the thief to justice. In the absence of a formal police force tasked with retrieving stolen objects and prosecuting the thieves, Wild's knowledge of the London underworld greatly increased the likelihood of recovering one's stolen belongings, especially when compared with the alternative of foregoing his services and privately advertising the loss of stolen articles in

64 *Evening Post*, May 15-18, 1725. The same articles are also reproduced in the *Daily Journal*, May 20, 1725.

the newspapers. His reputation gave him the standing of a self-appointed official, as exemplified by this entry in *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* in October 1720, in which thieves about to be transported made amends by delivering their unsold booty to the thief-taker:

> Some of the 95 Felons aforemention'd, before they left Newgate, deliver'd to Jonathan Wild, the Thief-Taker, vast Numbers of Pocket-Books, in which were very useful Notes and Papers to the Owners, desiring him to take care to restore them, it being, as they said, the only Satisfaction they were capable of making their injured country.[65]

Thus, Wild acts as intermediary between objects and their subjects as well as thieves and their victims, or, in the words of the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild*, "placing himself so only in the middle, between the Loser and the Robber; as to capitulate for the latter".[66] As he appraises the thief's spoils, taking into consideration their base monetary worth, their personal value, and his own reward as well as the thief's (from which he would claim a commission), he exercises control over not only the booty, but also its relationship with its legitimate owner, arbitrating between objects, subjects, and things. Wild himself takes on the characteristics of a quasi-object, able to assign temporary subjecthood in an otherwise indistinguishable collective through movement, or, perhaps more fittingly in this case, even a quasi-subject, who designates a number of objects and subjects through his transactional agency, controlling and assigning meaning and worth to otherwise lost, unmarketable things. The *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* distinguishes between Wild as an intermediary between thief and victim, "no otherwise than as a Sollicitor takes his Fee, on Consideration from both Parties, for honestly putting an end to a Lawsuit, and bringing the contending Parties to a friendly Accommodation", and a more threatening position where he places "himself in the middle, between the Law and the Offender, in a manner,

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65 *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, Oct. 29, 1720.
66 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), 16.

commuting the Felony", which power should remain the prerogative of "the supreame Magistrate."[67]

IV.2 Clothing, status, and belonging

Wild's business thus depends on his complete mastery over objects, things, thieves, and theft-victims. An all-powerful subject, he relies on his knowledge of the London criminal underworld and eighteenth-century legal processes, as well as his ability to manipulate the material world, to avoid prosecution and exploit thieves and courts alike. However, his success relies upon maintaining an honest and powerful persona as self-appointed 'Thief-Taker General', a character which he creates, according to his biographers, through careful control of the material world in general, and items of clothing in particular.

Clothing is omnipresent in the Wild narratives: not only were clothing and fabrics a very common target for eighteenth-century thieves (over one quarter of the advertisements published by Wild in the London newspapers included clothes in their list of stolen items, a ratio which jumps to over one half when accounting for accessories such as jewellry and watches; see figure III), but elaborate costumes and disguises were an important part of the mythology surrounding the thieving arts as described by criminal biographers. H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death* thus describes flocks of thieves dressed as innocuous members of the public, "furnish'd with laced Coats, brocade Wastcoat [sic], [and] fine Perriwigs", or "like young Mercers or Drapers, being always dress'd in very clean Cloth, good Wigs and good Linen, with a Ring or Rings on their Fingers" descending upon all forms of assemblies to prey on the unsuspecting public.[68] Careful manipulation of sartorial indicators of class and status allow entrance to otherwise difficult to access public

67 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), 16.
68 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 33 & 34.

Figure III: Wild's advertisements

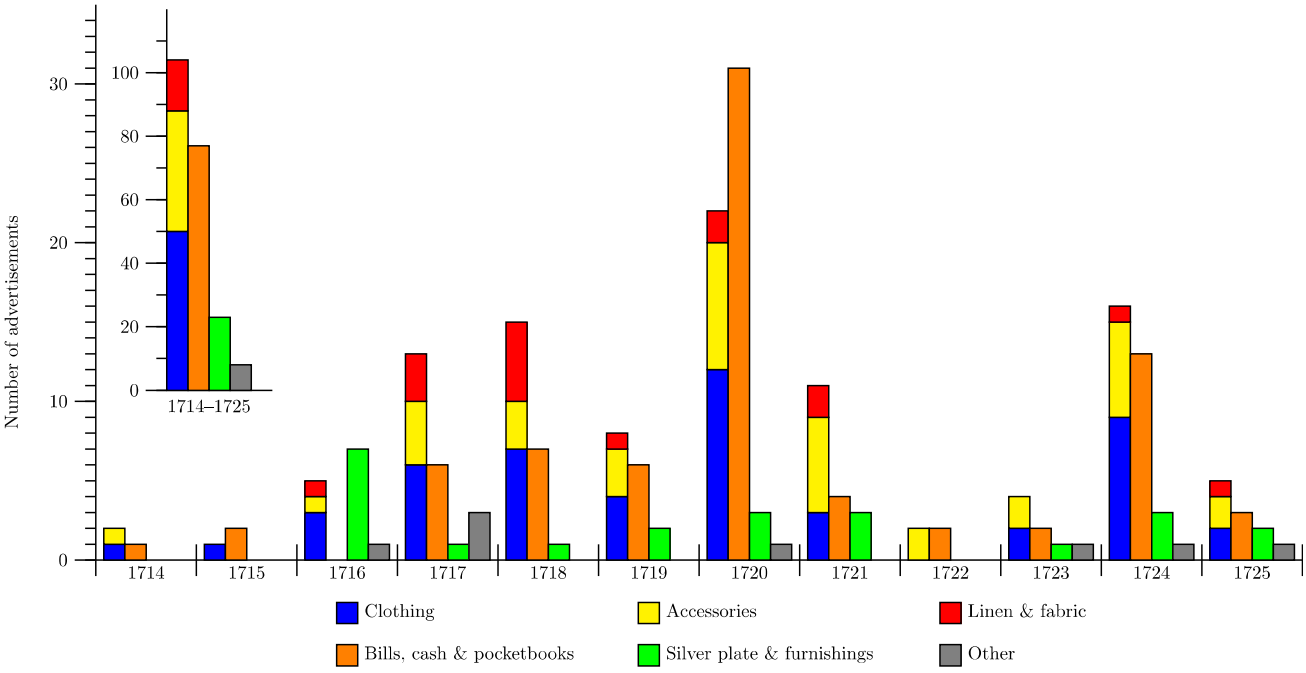


Figure III.1: Wild's advertisements, by type. I was able to find 186 of Wild's advertisements in the London newspapers between 1714 and 1725. The 'accessories' category includes watches, jewelry and swords, while the 'bills, cash and furnishing' category also includes account books. Pocket books were included in this category as they often contained the missing bills. The wide majority of the advertisements were published in the *Daily Courant*. The data was compiled through the Burney online archive, and as such cannot be considered perfectly complete. The spike in 'bills, cash and pocket books' in 1720 is due to the repeated publication of advertisements for the same bills.

Loſt on Tueſday the 2d Inſtant, about 5 a Clock in the Morning, from the Houſe of Mr. Iſaac Senior Henriques in Fenchurch-ſtreet, the following Goods, viz. A Silver Tankard, a Coffee-Pot, a Tea-Pot and Lamp, 6 Silver Spoons, 6 Silver Forks, 4 Silver Salts, 5 Silver Forks Dutch Silver, 4 Silver Spoons Dutch Silver, a Silver Salver, 7 Tea-Spoons, a Silver Tongs, Two Yards and half of Lawn, a Riding-hood, 1 Cambrick Neckcloth. Whoever brings them to the ſaid Mr. Iſaac Senior Henriques, or to Mr. Jonathan Wild in the Old Bailey, ſhall have Three Guineas Reward for the whole, or in Proportion for part thereof, and no Queſtion asked. If offer'd to be ſold or pawn'd, pray ſtop the ſame.

Figure III.2: One of Wild's advertisements, following a housebreaking, taken out in the Daily Courant, Apr. 5, 1721.

spaces such as the royal court or genteel entertainments, while tales of the elaborate disguises allegedly used by thieves warn against false appearances and unrestrained social mingling.

The Wild narratives' depiction of their hero's power over clothing is however not limited to disguise. Indeed, the thief-taker himself uses clothes and accessories as a way to gain and assert his authority as a public figure. The *Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild,* which was published prior to his execution, lists a number of very public gifts to prison personnel in celebration of his wedding: "the Ordinary of Newgate and the Executioner, [appeared] at the Tree with Gloves and Favours. … Favours and Gloves were also plentifully distributed to the Turnkeys, and their Assistants, of the several Gaols, to be worn in Honour of the Nuptials", while the Newgate prisoners receive some brandy.[69] According to Ilana Krausma Ben-Amos, offering gloves meant to be worn during the wedding celebrations "was customary among prosperous men and women [by the mid-seventeenth century]."[70] This traditional gesture cements Wild's role as unofficial head of the carceral system, not only ruling over the criminals he apprehended, but also declaring his close links to the public officials responsible for their incarceration and execution.

Moreover, Wild's use of clothing to assert his status is not limited to gift-giving. He himself adopts specific accessories to signify his profession and authority materially. According to the *Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild*, a newly-affluent Wild expresses his success sartorially: "He was now become very eminent in his Profession of Thief catching, &c. and made a considerable Figure in the World, having a Silver mounted Sword, and a Footman at his Heels."[71] Wild here adopts the trappings of

69 *An Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 13-14. I was unable to find any reports confirming such a display for Wild's wedding in the London newspapers.

70 Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 167.

71 *An Authentick Narrative of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 7.

prosperous gentility, including an expensive male servant, whose employment "in some instances … was as much to impress neighbours and friends as to benefit from the particular services they provided."[72] In addition to adopting upper-class costume, the thief-taker dresses the part. H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death* describes the multiple footmen who attend to Wild's wife, while Jonathan himself

> went doubly and trebly arm'd, and often wore Armour under his Cloaths, which he took care to shew in all Companies; being attended by three or four, and sometimes half a Dozen terrible looking Fellows by way of Garde du Corps, as if all the Thieves in England had vowe'd to sacrifice him.[73]

Wild here acts the honest thief-taker, constantly under threat of violence from the accomplices of the felons he fearlessly apprehends. This very obvious display of force, complete with visible, yet supposedly concealed, armor, and multiple adequately ferocious bodyguards, serves to strengthen his reputation and authority as private law enforcement. The biography swiftly negates this projection, asserting that Wild's presence in a crowd works in his thieves' favour, as it lulls potential victims into a false sense of security, while his bulky costume allows him to carry off their booty unnoticed.[74]

Finally, Wild does not limit himself to exploiting existing socially-meaningful items of clothing. Instead, he also creates his own, in the form of a silver staff with which he invests himself with false public authority in his office of thief-taker. The articles listed against him in preparation for his trial thus include: "That in order to carry on these vile Practises [sic] to gain some Credit with the ignorant Multitude, he usually carried about him a short Silver Staff as a Badge of Authority from the Government which he used to produce, when he himself was concerned in robbing."[75] Producing his own version of a publicly recognised symbol of authority, Wild usurps its power in order to cover his illegal

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72 Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 31.
73 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 57.
74 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 57.
75 *Evening Post*, May 15-18, 1725. The same report is also reproduced in the *Daily Journal*, May 20, 1725.

activities and claim his place in the policing system.

These biographies demonstrate Wild's authority over the material world, which allow him to maintain his position as both law-enforcer and criminal. Unsurprisingly, they depict his demise as brought about by his loss of control over objects: indeed, one particular object, the stolen lace which brought him to trial. In a complete role reversal, the theft-victim catches the thief-taker. The gang leader's exploitation of dress and disguise is thus not always successful in the Wild narratives, and his interest in formal and meaningful accessories can also become the subject of satire. The *View of London and Westminster: or, the London Spy* describes an altogether fictional funeral procession for the thief-taker in St. Sepulchre's Parish, including retired highwaymen “in Mourning Cloaks and Pistols in their Hands”, “Turnkeys of Prisons, their Keys hung in Mourning”, and “the Tyburn-Typographer in deep Mourning, and a large Favour in his Hat, with this Motto, 'No more Mr. Jonathan Wild, at his House in the Old-Baily, -- Guineas Reward, and no Questions asked.'”[76] Each carries the symbols of their profession, while the more enigmatic 'Tyburn typographer' (which could refer to the Ordinary of Newgate, his printer John Applebee, or the more general figure of a criminal biographer) carries an ornament decorated with Wild's well known template for newspaper advertisements. The mourners represent every aspect of the carceral business, from thieves to prison guards to authors and publishers, grieving the loss of an excellent client and provider. The sartorial expression of their grief mirrors that of Wild's above-mentioned wedding, where the same circles wore gloves and favours to celebrate the thief-taker's nuptials, and the whole scene adopts a mock-heroic aspect, as Wild is sent off with a procession fit for a popular public official.

However, it is in Henry Fielding's *Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* that sartorial matters are exploited to their fullest to tell and satirise the (vastly fictional) life of the

76 *A View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy* (1728), 34-36.

famed thief-taker. Relying on the same basic satirical apparatus as Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, Fielding's mock heroic narrative equates Wild's thieving world to political callousness, as upper-class sociability is grafted on lower-class environments. This satire, which rests primarily on the parallel between Wild's cynical system and that of the dominant political class, also addresses matters of social ambition and hierarchies. As a visible, yet disposable, representation of status, clothing plays well within the narrative's general critique.

With its parody of upper-class sociability and values, Jonathan's world of prostitutes, bailiffs and thieves is one in which social permeability is easily achievable, its hierarchies often void of any moral value and based uniquely on sartorial appearances and financial success. The young Wild, under the supervision of the gamester Count La Ruse, thus navigates social boundaries through dress: “a long Intimacy and Friendship subsisted between the Count and Mr. Wild, who, being by the Advice of the Count dressed in good Cloaths, was by him introduced into the best Company”[77]. He can then cut the figure of a beau, and passes for a gentleman. Defined only by adequate clothing, gentility is constructed as a relatively simple 'put on'. Moreover, the parallels drawn between upper- and lower-class allow for a double edged critique. According to Claude Rawson,

> the supposed gentility appears at best as a moneyed one, and the comic disparity between Wild and the world of polite accomplishments is always more vividly emphasized than any analogy. ... Even by the standards of that low parody of polite society in which he moves ..., Wild is an ungenteel failure.[78]

Clothing here functions as the focus point of a multifaceted satire, directed not only at a shallow upper-class, but also at Wild's ultimately unsuccessful social ambition. His failure also comments on the adequacy of sartorial indicators of status: while being constructed and used as a potentially potent signifying system, its very power is ultimately censured by

77 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:26.

78 Claude Rawson, “Fielding's 'Good' Merchant: the Problem of Heartfree in 'Jonathan Wild' (with Comments on Other 'Good' Characters in Fielding).” *Modern Philology* 69.4 (May 1972), 296.

Wild's inability to rise socially.

By drawing a governing contrast between the main character's villainy and its opposite to highlight the distinction between greatness and goodness, Fielding's narrative presents mostly two-dimensional characters. They are defined by their immediate contribution to the plot and a set of stereotypical traits: Heartfree the jeweller is good but naive, Wild's wife Laetitia is unchaste, while her gallant, Tom Smirk,[79] is a 'beau'. Several of these minor characters who embody reprehensible gender types are understood through their sartorial appearance. Jonathan's wife, "chaste Laetitia",[80] entertains several lovers, both before and after her marriage. Chosen for their physical attractions, these lovers embody the stereotype of the 'beau' or fop. Giving "particular, or excessive, attention to dress, mien, and social etiquette",[81] the beau is constructed, in opposition to a growing ideal of a more muscular masculinity, as an effeminate and reprehensible figure, often referring to the transgressive subculture of the London Mollies.[82] In the *Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, the beau is openly equated to his clothing: "As we take Dress to be the Characteristic or efficient Quality of a Beau, we shall, instead of giving any Character of this young Gentleman, content ourselves with describing his Dress only to our Readers".[83] A minute description of this character's clothing follows, along with a complaint on female preference for looks over substance. With sartorial appearance as his primary character trait, the figure of the beau, and with it, young Wild himself, is mocked and condemned, along with ladies' alleged weakness for such vacuous individuals. Other beaux are treated similarly, their good looks and "clean Linen" forming "heroic Qualities",

79 Fittingly, "smirk" is a cant word for "a finical, spruce Fellow". B.E., *A new dictionary of the canting crew* (London: Printed for W. Hawes, P. Gilbourne and W. Davis, 1699).
80 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:36.
81 "beau, adj. and n.". *OED.*
82 Beth H. Friedman-Romell, "Breaking the Code: Toward a Reception Theory of Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Eighteenth-Century London." *Theatre Journal* 47.4. *Eighteenth-Century Representation* (Dec. 1995), 465.
83 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:34.

which are only lightly marred by lack of intelligence, “Honour, Honesty, or Good-nature”.[84] Although it is the tool of satire, used to mock the shallowness of this particular example of failed masculinity, dress is also the butt of the joke.

These sartorial codes however represent much more than a convenient, if unreliable, signifying system. Throughout Fielding's narrative, Jonathan Wild's attempts to manage and mould his reputation, as well as his claim to ethical status, is questioned by his inability to assign meaning to representative items of clothing. Whether trying to create his own sartorial significations or usurp that of others, Wild’s failure to control this complex system highlights his essential powerlessness, in spite of all his claims to greatness. His status as a gang-leader is sartorially questioned by Blueskin, who becomes one of his captains in this fictional biography: as Wild responds to his grievances by pointing to the “piece of ribbon [Blueskin] wears in [his] hat, with which [Wild] dubbed him captain”, Blueskin rejects the signifying weight of the ornament, retorting that “he could have bought [this piece of ribbon himself] for six-pence and wore without [his] Leave”.[85] Refusing Wild's system of representation, Blueskin questions his status and power within his gang, a challenge which is enhanced by his real-life murder attempt on Wild. Although the fictional Jonathan promptly punishes the rebel by planting a watch on him and getting him arrested and hanged for theft, Blueskin's challenge nonetheless undermines Wild's power within his gang.

By the end of the narrative, Wild is not only incapable of creating his own set of sartorial representations, but is also unable to usurp efficiently a pre-existing one. Imprisoned in Newgate, Wild sets about taking control of the prison's population by toppling its former leader with the support of other thieves and seizing his predecessor’s clothing as a sign of his newly-won power. His authority is however quickly called into

84 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:39.
85 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:132.

question, as he sports the dress representative of his new status. These clothes

> kept him not warm; nor could the Finery of it do him much Honour, since everyone knew it did not properly belong to him, nor indeed suited his Degree: As to the Wastecoat, it fitted him very ill, being infinitely too big for him; and the Cap was so heavy that it made his Head ake. Thus these Clothes ... brought him ... Envy, Hatred and Detraction.[86]

Tricked out in these ill-fitting clothes, which give him physical pain, Wild's failure to truly become king of Newgate aggravates the loss of control which leads him to his demise. His growing inability to navigate and manipulate sartorial codes gradually dis-empowers him. Fielding's mock biography thus disables the thief-taker, transforming him from the criminal mastermind projected in his early biographies, to failed social upstart. In the *Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, Wild's ambitions and downfall are represented through his relationships with clothing, the thief-taker focus on appearance over substance preventing him from ever achieving thorough control over the material world. Fielding's Jonathan Wild is thus very different from that given in earlier accounts of his life. Feeding on by-then classic mock-heroic satire, this tongue-in-cheek biography aims to critique and experiment, as Wild's life becomes a scaffold for satire, instead of its focus.

IV.3 Owning bodies, owning lives

Although opposed in purpose, satirical, fictional, and factual biographies of Jonathan Wild all ascribe the thief-taker's success or failure to his ability to master and manipulate the material world, from the objects he fences to significant items of dress and accessories. However, in texts composed before or immediately following his execution, where Wild is invested with authoritarian control, it is not limited to inanimate objects. Not only is it extended to theft-victims and criminals alike, who struggle to maintain their grasp on lost and stolen things while the thief-taker remotely directs them with ease, but

86 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:147.

the thieves themselves are but another profitable, and very material, asset within Wild's business venture.

Until his practices became more widely known, the real life Jonathan Wild was a public figure of authority in early eighteenth-century London. Not only was he routinely asked to give character references and testimony at the Old Bailey, but his reputation was enough to enable him, as reported by the *Daily Journal*, to spontaneously take the lead during a skirmish between Londoners and visitors, as "the famous Jonathan Wild the Thief taker being at their Head, as General, [they] obliged the Country People to retire."[87] His alleged grip on the criminal underworld was even tighter, at least according to his former master and competitor, City Marshall Charles Hitchen who, in his rather nonsensical 1718 pamphlet attack on Wild in the *Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London*, dubs him "King amongst the Thieves, and Lying Master General of England, Captain General of the Army of Plunderers, and Embassador Extraordinary from the Prince of the Air."[88] An envoy from the devil, Wild rules over the criminal underworld as monarch and general, with power of life and death over the thieves whom he could condemn or reprieve, protect or sacrifice, thanks to the evidence he collects. This royal relationship is also played upon in H.D's *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death*, where one of Wild's recruits is "the Subject, nay, the Slave of Jonathan."[89] The thief-taker is lord and master of London's criminal underground, owning the thieves as a master owns a slave, and protecting with violence his assets and competition. He is thus responsible for the dissolution of a number of London gangs that threatened his monopoly over the market for stolen goods, among them the Carrick gang, formed of over thirty footpads, many of Irish origins.[90]

87 *Daily Journal*, Aug. 19, 1721.
88 *The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London* (1718), 5.
89 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 26.
90 Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, 172. For an account of Wild's gang-breaking activities, see Chapter XVII

Wild's control over the thieves he employs as well as those who resist his authority is achieved through his exact bookkeeping. He runs his illegal business with precision, according to the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the late Jonathan Wild*, "like a Man of Business, and had his Books to enter every thing in it with the utmost Exactness and Regularity."[91] In the *Beggar's Opera*, this account book also contains the precise details of the criminal's behaviours, thefts and whereabouts. The play opens with Peachum, Wild's on-stage alter-ego, poring over his books, which he carefully updates as one of his thieves is tried and condemned to hang: "This is death without reprieve. I may venture to book him. [writes.] For Tom Gagg, forty pounds." He then uses his "Register of the Gang" in order to decide the fate of other employees, taking into account their earnings, loyalty, and behaviour, to choose which thieves are to be hanged at the next session.[92] Such callous behaviour is repeated later in the play, as he barters with his associate Lockit, jailor of Newgate, with whom he shares the profits earned through hanging.[93] The thieves are thus assessed in terms of their monetary value, which must be carefully managed or risks being lost to some other enterprising felons: to Mrs. Peachum's dismay, womaniser Bob Booty, must be sent to trial and executed as "he spends his life among women, and as soon as his money is gone, one or the other of the ladies will hang him for the reward, and there's forty pound lost to us for-ever."[94] The rogues of the *Beggar's Opera* become the helpless objects of a bloody transaction, only barely avoided through direct interference of the fictional author of the play, the beggar, who is urged to spare Macheath, Polly Peachum's condemned lover, as "an Opera must end happily."[95]

Although set in a fictional setting, Peachum's callousness directly mirrors Wild's own

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and XVIII, 171-86 & 187-205.

91 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), 21.

92 Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), I:2 & I:3.

93 See Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), II:10 & III:5.

94 Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, (1728), I:4.

95 Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), III:16

reputation for venality, as the thief-taker is repeatedly reproached for 'selling blood'. The articles taken against Wild prior to his trial thus denounce his manipulation of the legal system, arguing that “he hath frequently sold human Blood by procuring false Evidence to swear Persons into Facts they were not guilty of, sometimes to prevent them from being Evidence against himself, at others for the sake of the grat[sic] Reward given by the Government."[96] According to Alexander Smith in his 1726 biography of the criminal, this outrage is also at the root of the mob's violent treatment of the thief-taker as he rode the cart to Tyburn: “the Mob ... pelted him with Stones and Dirt all the Way, broke his Head in several Places, and revil'd him with the most opprobrious Language, for having Sold more human Blood at forty Pounds per Head, than would fill the Canal in St. James's Park." [97] Although he is ultimately condemned for his involvement in a theft and reviled for his corruption, popular resentment against the thief-taker is directed at his calculated barbarity, as he trades in human life and bodies with as little concern as he does in stolen objects.

IV.4 Wild's body: *control, dissection, and dismemberment*

The thief-taker thus not only directs the circulation of stolen things in London and beyond, but also the very body of the metropolis' criminals, which he tracks, commands, apprehends and finally sells to the courts and executioner. Moreover, Wild's gradual loss of control over London's criminal and legal circles is paralleled in his own body, his demise physically inscribed through ill-health, imprisonment, execution and dissection, and the gang-leader dehumanised and demonised through fictionalised life-writing.

Initially, the young Wild demonstrates impressive control of his own body. One of the most influential Wild biographies, H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death*, describes one of his earliest tricks: able to dislocate his hip bone at will, a young

96 *Evening Post*, May 15-18, 1725. The same report is also reproduced in the *Daily Journal*, May 20, 1725.
97 “Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, &c.” *SMLT26*, 18.

Wild makes the most of this skill first to avoid military recruitment, as he thought that he "might push his Fortune some better Way than by standing to be shot at",[98] and then to swindle a whole village with the help of a quack doctor, who executes a 'miraculous' cure on the fake cripple. Moreover, Wild uses dismemberment, a fate closely linked to the ignominious punishment of dissection which threatened the thieves he sent to Tyburn, to his own ends, returning stolen items through a ghostly hand which appeared through " a small Pannel [sic] of the Wainscot" so his clients could retrieve their belongings, and offer payment, "without their seeing the body which belong'd to it; so that they cou'd not say he had ever taken any of their Money, or receiv'd the stolen Goods."[99] However, such thorough control is short-lived, and Wild soon finds himself required to fight for his life and bodily integrity. Once in London, he suffers numerous attacks as disgruntled criminals such as Blueskin attempt to dispatch the thief-taker. In his 1734 account, Charles Johnson comments on Wild's poor health during his imprisonment, caused by violent encounters with rogues, "having received Wounds in almost every Part of his Body, [he] had his Skull twice fractured, and his whole Constitution so broken by these Accidents, [that] he was scarce able to stand upright",[100] an assessment confirmed by the Ordinary of Newgate, who adds that Wild's erratic behaviour in prison "was owing to those Wounds, and in particular to two fractures in his Skull, which disordered his Brain, tho' cover'd with silver Plates."[101] Jonathan thus maintains his authority over the bodies and lives of the London criminals at the price of his own physical integrity, which he fatally loses, like the felons he sent to the gallows, under the authority of the courts, the keepers of Newgate, and the executioner.

Once incarcerated, Jonathan Wild completely loses control over his own body. Where John Sheppard was able to manipulate the objects of imprisonments to resist

98 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 3.
99 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 14-15.
100 "The Life of Jonathan Wild." *JGHL34*, 470.
101 *ONA* (OA17250524).

judicial and carceral control and making multiple escapes, the imprisoned Wild is even unsuccessful in his desperate attempt to preserve his bodily autonomy through suicide by laudanum. Describing his last days and execution, the *Daily Post* reports that "Jonathan Wild did, about 2 a[sic] Clock in the Morning, take a great Quantity of Liquid Laudanum secretly convey'd to him, but taking too great a Dose, vomited it up in a great measure, and liv'd to be hang'd."[102] Not only did Wild survive to be executed the next day, he was only narrowly and temporarily saved from yet another form of penal objectification, dissection, through a stratagem. The same report continues: "Wild's dead Body was put into a Coach, and it being given out that it was design'd for the Surgeons, the Populace acquiesc'd, by which Means it was carry'd off to be interr'd."[103] Where the mob had attempted to protect Sheppard from the surgeons, in Wild's case, they can only be pacified by the prospect of dismemberment, a further post-mortem degradation which Blueskin famously attempted during his attack, as he had wished "he could have cut off [Wild's] Head, and thrown it over the Wall into the Yard among the Rabble"[104]. The mob's acquiescence implies that they were ready to perform it themselves, an assessment made plain in Alexander Smith's biography of the thief-taker, which states that the mob would have "torn him to peices[sic], but [for this stratagem] ...truly Jonathan's Carcass was not worth such an Operation, for he was so contaminated with Venereal Performances with lewd Women that it was perfectly Rotten long before he died."[105] Wild's body does not even deserve this ignominious punishment, his disease-ridden carcass embodying his own moral corruption.

This reprieve was however short-lived, as the corpse was later stolen from its grave.[106] Speculation was rife as to who was responsible for the theft, the discovery of

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102 *Daily Post*, May 25, 1725.
103 *Daily Post*, May 25, 1725. The same stratagem is also mentioned in the *Daily Journal*, May 25, 1725, and in the *London Journal*, May 29, 1725.
104 *Weekly Journal or Saturday Post*, Oct. 17, 1724.
105 "Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, &c." *SMLT26*, 22.
106 *Daily Post*, May 31, 1725.

dissected remains assumed to be Wild's in the *Daily Post*[107] competing with rumors that his corpse was "sent to Leyden, to be reposited among the Rarities of the University there."[108] The mystery remained complete until at least 1847, when a Dr. Frederick Fowler bequeathed a skeleton, which he claimed to be Wild's, that he had inherited from his predecessor's practice, to the Royal College of Surgeons. Whether or not this skeleton is indeed Wild's, it is likely that his body was stolen and dissected in spite of his widow's precautions,[109] as the thief-catcher himself turns from a living subject to an object to be stolen and sold, and finally an unrecognisable thing.

As he lost his influence over legal and carceral circles, Jonathan Wild underwent the loss of bodily autonomy associated with the incarceration and execution he condemned so many thieves to. In spite of attempts to prevent his dissection, his corpse was nonetheless defiled as he relinquished his authority over the town and its criminals. The Wild narratives thus trace his rise to unprecedented power in London's market in lost and stolen goods, its criminal underground, as well as the courts, to his fitting demise as the fearsome thief-taker becomes a pathetic and reviled suicidal cripple, and finally a monstrous, unrecognisable thing. The violent destruction of his body, which naturally concludes all biographies of Jonathan Wild, subdues the otherwise formidable gang-leader, who can then become an easy trope for political satire. This process is paralleled by one of demonisation, the thief-taker's unimaginable greed and corruption, as well as his uncanny power over objects and things, becoming the symptom of a much darker, animalistic, or supernatural evil. While H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, From his Birth to his Death*, animalises and objectifies Wild in his worst moments of violence, describing him variously as a fox, a tiger, and finally an orange stuck with cloves (in reference to the amount of

107 *Daily Journal*, Jun. 5, 1725.
108 *Daily Journal*, May 31, 1725.
109 Howson, *Thief-Taker General*, 282. The articulated skeleton is now on display in the Hunterian museum (object num: RCSHM/Osteo. 336).

weapons he carried), [110] his competitor Hitchen compares him to a baboon[111], probably in reference to his dark features and 'hairy breast'. This allows the *Daily Journal* to speculate that the dissected remains discovered after his grave was opened were indeed his.[112] Alexander Smith expands on this baboon comparison, sarcastically reporting that, as "he had a Skin like a Mulatto, and in his Face the very Features of a Baboon, ... some Men conjectur'd that his Mother permitted, for a Change of Diet, such a Creature to make a Cuckold of his Father."[113] Such attacks serve to further discredit and make other the thief-taker, whose inexplicable immorality and cruelty must stem from an inhuman heritage. While in themselves threatening, Wild's animalistic qualities set him apart as a unique, uncharacteristic example of evil. Preserving the spine-chilling attractions of criminal biography, which frames tales of corruption and immorality within a narrative of righteous punishment, animal metaphors designate him as a less-than-human enormity, now justly destroyed and stripped of his subjecthood by the legal system he abused.

Wild's inhuman characteristics are not invoked only through parallels with animals, however. Satirical treatments of the life of the thief-taker assign him demonic abilities: in the *View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy*, he is elevated to a form of perverse sainthood, as a relic soaked with his blood provides a certain cure for "Any Person addicted to Pilfering and of a Fraudulent and Corrupt Disposition".[114] The biography included at the end of the poem *Weighley, alias Wild. ... in Imitation of Hudibras*, ascribes his unnatural suitability for crime to supernatural forces, as infant Wild must have been "changed in the Cradle."[115] However, it is the *Life and Glorious Actions Of the most*

110 H.D., *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), 29-30.
111 *The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London* (1718), 8. Wild counter-attacks by claiming that the City Marshall himself only wants "a Cloven Foot to personate in all Respects his Father Belzebub." *An Answer to A late Insolent Libel* (1718), 8.
112 *Daily Journal*, Jun. 5, 1725.
113 "Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, &c." *SMLT26*, 18.
114 *A View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy* (1728), 37.
115 N.P. *Weighley, alias Wild* (1725), 28.

Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde, the first straightforwardly satirical biography of the criminal, and a clear inspiration for Henry Fielding's *Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, which takes this supernatural explanation to its fullest extent. It concludes with a hyperbolic description of the thief-taker:

> His Breath Blasteth all that's[sic] near him. No Person is safe in his Company. He is Poyson to Poyson, and frightens all other Serpents with his hissing only. His Eyes are each like the Hellish Monster Gorgon, and his Complexion equal with that of Lucifer. His Fingers are like the Claws of a Lion, and his Body like that of a Babboon, with a short Tail, wherein lies his Sting like that of a Scorpion. [116]

A monstrous hybrid endowed with supernatural powers, Wild becomes altogether demonic, his body a jumble of animal parts. Animalistic descriptions of the criminal are conflated and exaggerated to create a grotesque figure, his reputed venereal corruption represented through a venomous sting. Classical and Christian imagery meld to create a fearsome creature, able to corrupt and petrify, deadly and terrifying even to other monsters. This extravagant description, along with the multiple other fantastical claims which make up the *Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde*, squarely sets this biography in the realm of satirical fiction, as the frightful thief-taker becomes a grotesque boogeyman. As the courts and executioner destroy his body, then monetised by both the shop-owner responsible for his conviction, and the unknown grave robber who sold his corpse, Wild becomes a mythical creature, an immoral aberration, or an inhuman thing. Although presented as a biography, complete with claims to “Brevity, Perspicuity, and Truth”, this pastiche makes no attempt to fool its readers into trusting its contents. Mandatory assertions of veracity are soon forgotten, as the biography begins by drafting an altogether ludicrous genealogy for Wild, a descendant of 'Patrick Mac Judas Wild', whose family are “in Nature savage Beasts, not only void of Religion, Government,

116 *The Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde* (1725), 55-56.

&c. but also of Christianity universally",[117] and the real-life thief-taker turns into a grotesque punchinello.

IV.5 A dismembered life

While the *Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde* is unapologetic in its use of fiction to embellish its account of the life of the famous criminal, other, more factual biographies must tread a careful line between facts and sensationalism. Wild's appeal resides precisely in his own shifting identity, from law-enforcer to law-breaker, from public hero to popular villain. The biographer is faced with the task of constructing a narrative that addresses satisfactorily the audience's expectations of a well-known life-story, but must also embed it within one bolstering the legitimacy of legal processes without stripping the narrative of its attractions. According to Hal Gladfelder:

> the ideological burden of most criminal biographies is ... to reaffirm the legitimacy of legal authority. But ... the pleasure of such narratives does not derive from their endlessly reiterated endorsement of the prevailing social and political orders, ... but from their smuggling of vividly concrete and sometimes problematic material into the traditional patterns.[118]

Wild's biographers are faced with a dilemma similar to that of the beggar in Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, who must dismiss "strict poetical justice" in favour of a downright absurd, if happy, ending in order "to comply with the taste of the town."[119] As his body was, Wild's life is dismembered in a struggle for control between biographers, as original texts are mixed, hacked and pasted, reprinted, adapted, and rewritten for each new published iteration of his story.[120] A tale of criminals safely profiting from other, lesser

117 *The Life and Glorious Actions Of the most Heroic and Magnanimous Jonathan Wilde* (1725), 3 & 5.
118 Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative*, 77.
119 Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), III:16.
120 For a very literal example of such dismemberment, see *Anecdotes, Bon mots, Traits, Stratagems and Biographical Sketches of the most remarkable Highwaymen, Swindlers, and other daring Adventurers, Who have flourished, from a very early Period to the present Time. To which is added, A Great Number of Apposite Curiosities. Collected and comprised, so as to render the Whole Both Cautionary and*

criminals, who must provide the work and suffer all the risk, Jonathan Wild's life lends itself to easy comparisons to the literary market of Grub Street in general and criminal biography in particular.

The Wild biographies feature a number of references to their market rivals. Henry Fielding nods towards "that excellent Historian, who from authentic Papers and Records, &c. hath already given so satisfactory an Account of the Life and Actions of this Great Man" in the preface to his *Miscellanies.*[121] He is probably referring to the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild*. Published some months after the first wave of biographies following Wild's execution, the *True and Genuine Account* forcefully defends the integrity of its contents, allegedly based on Wild's private papers and first-hand accounts, in its preface. John Applebee orchestrated a thorough publicity campaign praising its accuracy in preparation for its publication, which prompted a swift response from the printers of a rival account, H.D.'s *Life of Jonathan Wild, from his Birth to his Death*: several advertisements for H.D.'s account comment that "it will be soon seen which Account is supported by the best Authorities."[122] The competition between biographies was rife, as printers and publishers anticipated the demand produced by the execution of such a famous felon. The "Life of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker" published in 1735 as part of the *Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals who have been Condemn'd and Executed*, thus warns:

> As no Person in this Collection ever made so much Noise as the Person we are now speaking of, so never any Man perhaps, in any Condition of Life whatever had so many Romantick Stories fathered upon him in his Life, or so many fictitious Legendary Accounts… pushed into the World to get a Penny at

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Entertaining; And as much an Object of Wonder as of Pity! (London: Printed for D. Brewman, No. 45, Old Bailey, 1797), which reproduces Fielding's *Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* almost in its entirety, yet in a completely different order so as to produce a series of moralistic tableaus instead of a mock-biography of the thief-catcher.

121 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, I:8.

122 The advertisement was published in the *Daily* Journal, May 28 & Jun. 4, 1725, and in *Mist's Weekly Journal*, Jun. 5, 1725.

> the time of his Death, when it was a proper Season for vending such Forgeries.[123]

As unscrupulous writers and printers rush to publish fanciful accounts, with little care for veracity or accuracy, criminal biography becomes lucrative, formulaic fiction. Previous accounts must thus be dismissed as 'fictitious' and 'romantic' by serious biographers, who nonetheless rely on these snubbed biographies: “The Life of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker” is itself directly adapted from Charles Johnson's “ Life of Jonathan Wild”, published one year prior, and which contains materials from the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account,* and the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* along with some original material.

However, one account of Jonathan Wild's life is particularly strident in its condemnation of careless biographers. The *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild,* the attribution of which to Defoe is still subject to debate, was produced some months after the first wave of biographies immediately followed Wild’s execution. This narrative purports to be written in clear opposition to journalistic sensationalism, claiming that it is the only exact account of the criminal's life. Although such an assertion is not uncommon for even the most imaginative biographies, this goes much further than the typical claim to have discovered the criminal's personal papers or to have been his last confident. Through both a preface and an introduction, the narrator dismisses the previous accounts, and asserts the veracity of his narrative: its title page advertises that it is “not made up of *Fiction* and *Fable*, but taken from his Own Mouth and collected from PAPERS of his own Writing”(original emphasis); “an early and timely notice” was given to the world “that such a work was preparing [and was] advertised ... in several public prints”; while the other accounts “have been evidently invented and framed out of the heads of the scribbling authors ... without regard to truth of

123 “The Life of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Thief-Taker.” *LMRC35,* II: 14.

fact, or even probability".[124]

In an attempt to control the errancy of its hero and his life through narrative authority and claims of veracity, this version of Jonathan Wild's life relies heavily on (alleged) primary sources, and is constructed as a complete opposite to sensational criminal biographies. However, the stern moral message carried out by the authoritarian narrator is undermined by uneasy shifts from attraction to Wild's cleverness, and righteous repulsion of his corrupting ways.

The *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* is presented as a serious, truthful and thoroughly researched account of Wild's life before it even begins its narrative. However, this concern with veracity does not end with the preface and introduction. The text also is filled with references to various sources, ranging from the narrator's personal encounters and experiences, to previous written accounts and stories, plain acknowledgment of ignorance, or witness statements and depositions. Repeatedly commenting on his tale and its sources, and either distancing himself ("some tell us [how true it is, I will not affirm]") or supporting them ("I have several stories by me at this time, which I have particular reasons to believe are true"),[125] the narrator asserts his authority through this inflated claim to veracity. A prerequisite of any criminal biography, no matter how fanciful, the claim to present the reader with nothing but the truth becomes an obsession in this narrative, intent on avoiding any association with the Grub Street writers.[126]

The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild's diatribe against fantastical Grub Street biographers is focused on their greed and lack of professional ethics:

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124 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), title page, v, & iii-iv.

125 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), 13 & 32.

126 On Grub Street, see Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1972).

> The author of this short but exact account of Mr Wild assures the world, that the greatest part of all that has hitherto appeared ... has been evidently invented and framed out of the heads of the scribbling authors, ..., without regard to truth of fact, or even to probability, or without making any conscience of their imposing on the credulous world ... upon the old *pick-pocket* principle of publishing anything to get a penny. (my emphasis)[127]

Grub-street writers are here associated with a very particular type of thief: the pickpocket. Unlike other more upfront felons, the pickpocket acts sneakily, discreetly removing the contents of a pocket, if not the pocket itself. Eighteenth-century pockets were not necessarily an inbuilt part of garments: women's pockets were removable objects, tied to the waist of the wearer, and hidden deep within the folds of the petticoat, while men's pockets were sewn on. Picking a pocket was not only an act of thievery, but also a breach of the victim's physical borders. According to Ariane Fennetaux, pockets and female privacy were intimately bonded: not only did a woman signal " almost directly towards her private parts [when putting her hand through slits in her skirt to access her pockets]", but they could also become "organic extensions of the self", as treasured mementos and indispensable personal items were safely enclosed within.[128] However, this already complex association is further complicated by yet another meaning attached to this word: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, pickpocket is a (now obsolete) substitute for plagiary.

The definition of plagiarism evolved considerably between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, an evolution which is paralleled by that of the notion of copyright. Early eighteenth-century legislators' attempts to produce an efficient definition of textual ownership were embedded deep within issues of printing customs and regulations, monopoly, access to knowledge, and authorial claims.[129] Controlled by the Stationer's

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127 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), v.

128 Ariane Fennetaux, "Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century" (*Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20:3, Spring 2008), 318 & 329.

129 Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge & London: Harvard UP, 1993), 42-48. For other detailed analyses of the development of copyright laws, see Joseph Loewenstein's *The Author's Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright* (Chicago: The University of

Company until 1709, the printing industry functioned on a system of monopolies, patents and stocks being shared – and protected – within the company. However, changing attitudes towards book production and consumption resulted in the famous Statute of Anne, or Copyright Act of 1709, first to limit copyright to a short period of time (fourteen years, after which the copyright returned to the authors for another fourteen, should they still be alive) and to identify the author as one of the primary owner of the text. The notion of plagiarism followed a similar curve: while in the seventeenth century, the plagiarist was in essence a pirate, who stole the copy, or the text in its entirety,[130] and in most cases committed a crime against the printer who had bought the original and the right to print it, the eighteenth-century definition had evolved to encompass the theft of snippets of text, or of ideas themselves, a crime committed directly against the author. According to Richard Terry,

> before 1700, plagiarism tends to be figured as a sort of petty theft, the desperate recourse of the creatively poverty-stricken; in the eighteenth century, however, it comes to be seen as a con or deception .... Part of this process is a shift of stigma from the act of plagiarism to the properties of the act, to the way in which, and spirit in which, the theft is carried out.[131]

Evolving notions of copyright and plagiarism slowly constructed the idea of authors as legitimate owners of their texts. However, this now well-accepted notion was still fragile in the eighteenth century, as competing factions attempted to assert, or gain, legal control over the print trade.

Whose pockets are the Grub-street biographers picking? That of their readers, by offering inaccurate, if not altogether fake sensational information? That of the 'true' biographers, by rendering their work difficult to sell and bland in comparison? Or that of their subject, by ruthlessly plundering and copying their most intimate narratives? The

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Chicago Press, 2002); or Jody Greene's *The Trouble with Ownership: Literary Property and Authorial Liability, 1660-1730* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2005).

130 Richard Terry, *The Plagiarism Allegation in English Literature from Butler to Sterne* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 14.

131 Terry, *The Plagiarism Allegation*, 23.

author of the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* clearly dissociates his biographical efforts from that of the Grub-street scribblers and their ambiguous practices by firmly, if not obsessionally, setting his narrative within the realm of the true and documented. However, his subtle association is double-edged: if an inaccurate biographer is a thief, is a more accurate one necessarily free from suspicion? Through this metaphor, and through his pose as the 'lawful' editor of Wild's life, this biographer risks himself taking on the role of the fence and thief-catcher, receiving the stolen goods and re-installing them into legal tender while denouncing the less-skilled thieves, yet leaving himself vulnerable to similar plagiarism claims. Thus, the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* reproduces excerpts from the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of Wild's trial and execution in its conclusion.[132]

Fielding also addresses issues of biography and theft in his mocking account of Jonathan Wild's life, and chooses a diametrically different approach. Where the *True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* highlights the truthfulness of its contents, the satirist rejects all claims to veracity, and embeds his narrative in fiction. He rejects any deep knowledge of his subject, apart from well-known other biographies, as “Roguery, and not a Rogue, is [his] Subject”. Unconstrained by expectations of veracity through his fictional approach, Fielding openly satirises biographers and their practices, going so far as ironically to adopt plagiarism, if the piece is “strong enough to justify the Theft to our Consciences.”[133] Pickpocketing, a significant element in his narrative, is generally described as an admirable skill, which requires talent and dexterity. Conventional biographical practices are openly ridiculed, as an added passage in the revised version of the text defines detailing the ancestry of one's hero as but

132 *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions Of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), 34-39.
133 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, I:9 & III:28.

a way to display the biographer's "great learning and knowledge of antiquity".[134] Moreover, the generic references to 'reliable' sources is grotesquely imitated: an openly fictional dialogue between Wild and his wife has been "overheard [by a Friend who had a long Intimacy in the Wild Family] and taken down verbatim", while the conversation between Wild and the Ordinary was "committed to Paper [by Wild] the Moment after it had past."[135] The impracticability and absurdity of such claims is further highlighted by the narrator's early acknowledgment that his account is fictional. Biographers and their deceiving practices are thus heartily satirised, along with each and every protagonist in this narrative, as the authoritative narrator himself is presented as dishonest.

Wild as a literary object thus remains a site of contention. As accounts of his life are taken apart in order to create new narratives, issues of control and ownership travel from the thief-catcher's business model to textual production, the inner workings of criminal biography exposed by the strife between competing texts and narrative authorities. While the figure of the gang-leader embodies mock-heroic critique through his real-life structuring and governing of a parallel, and criminal, London society, his uncanny ability to control the material world, an all-important aspect of the relationship between thieves and the object they steal, designate him, for a time, as an all-defining subject, able to maintain his subject-hood without direct physical contact. Like Sheppard, Wild strives to maintain control over bodies, things, and the trappings of eighteenth-century legal processes. However, where such control is a matter of survival for the 'noble' escapist, it is initially a business matter for the unscrupulous thief-taker. His gradual loss of control over legal processes and the criminal underground, as he falls prey to his own strategies during his disgrace, trigger the appropriation of his biography. His body and life become forms of

134 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:256 (Appendix A, 7.20).

135 Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:112.& III:178. This alleged 'source' is rendered even more absurd in the 1754 version of the text, where the conversation between Wild and the Ordinary is "taken down in shorthand by one who overheard it." Fielding, *Miscellanies*, III:292 (Appendix A, 385:13-5).

public property, as it is turned into an unrecognisable, demonic thing through both actual and literary dismemberment. His very life is also dismembered as it is repeatedly adapted for public consumption, calling into questions issues of textual and biographical ownership and veracity.

V – "A Yorkshire Tike has bit this Essex Calf."[1]: Dick Turpin

Dick Turpin is arguably one of the best-known British highwaymen. His popular reputation reached a peak with Richard Harrison Ainsworth's fictional account of his life in his novel *Rookwood*, published in 1834, which cemented his characterisation as a Robin Hood figure, protector of the poor, and fearless horseman.[2] The real-life criminal who gave his name to this legend is a much less romantic figure, although his fame was well-established at the time of his execution. Operating outside London for most of his career, Dick Turpin did not feature as frequently nor is he treated as fully as criminals such as Sheppard or Wild in the newspapers of the period. Journalistic coverage was focused on two moments of his career, that is, the downfall of his gang, and his trial and execution in York. Additionally, a pamphlet published around 1737, entitled *News News; Great and Wonderful News from London in an Uproar; or a How [sic] and Cry after the Great Turpin, with his Escape into Ireland*, described the capture of one of his associates as well as various encounters between Turpin, his victims and a sway of incompetent constables.[3] While single biographies were few, Turpin features prominently on the title pages and the advertisements for collected criminal biographies. Most of these texts have been adapted from *The Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* (1739),[4] which itself draws heavily on *The Trial of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* (1739)[5] and the *Old Bailey Proceedings* of the trials of the Gregory gang, of which Turpin

1 *York Courant*, Apr. 10, 1739, & *London Evening Post*, Apr. 12-14, 1739.
2 William Harrison Ainsworth, *Rookwood* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1834).
3 *New News: great and wonderful News from London in an Uproar; or a How [sic] and Cry after the great Turpin, with his Escape into Ireland* ([London?], [1737?]).
4 *The Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman, Who was executed at York for Horse-stealing, under the name of John Palmer on Saturday Ap. 7, 1739 .. The Whole collected from well attested Facts, and communicated by Mr. Richard Bayes, at the Green-Man on Epping-Forest, and other Persons of that County* (London: Printed for J. Standen, at D'Anvers's Head opposite Serjeant's Inn in Chancery Lane, 1739).
5 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes, on the 22d Day of March, 1739, before the Hon. Sir William Chapple, Knt. Judge of Assize, and one of His Majesty's Justice of the Court of King's Bench. Taken down in Court by Mr. Thomas Kyll, Professor of Shorthand* (York: Printed

was a well-known member.[6]

Thus, the biographies of Turpin found in Captain Mackdonald's *General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, ...* (1758),[7] *The Lives and Adventures of the Most Notorious Highway-waymen [sic], Street robbers and Murderers* (1759),[8] *The Bloody Register* (1764),[9] *The Tyburn Chronicle* (1768),[10] John Villette's *Annals of Newgate* (1776),[11] Sir James Montagu's *Old Bailey Chronicle* (1788)[12] and William Jackson's *New and Complete Newgate Calendar* (1795)[13] reproduce the (somewhat culled) text of the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman*. On the other hand, the *Select and Impartial Account of the Lives... of the Most Remarkable Convicts*(1760)[14] focuses on the Gregory gang as a whole, and simply adapts the text of the *Old Bailey Proceedings*.[15] One last text, contained in the *Malefactor's Register* (1779),[16] is also adapted from the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman*, but is couched in a much less crude style. Apart from the 1737 pamphlet, which features a song comparing Turpin to Robin Hood, none of these texts paints the highwayman in a particularly admiring light. The image of Turpin as a

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by Ward and Chandler Booksellers, at their Printing-Office in Coney-Street; and Sold at their Shop without Temple-Bar, London, 1739).

6 *OBP* "February 1735, trial of John Field alias Fielder, Joseph Rose" (t17350226-45), "February 1735, trial of John Field, Joseph Rose, Humphry Walker, William Bush alias Saunders alias Schooling" (t17350226-46), and "May 1735, trial of Samuel Gregory" (t17350522-20).

7 "The Life of Richard Turpin." *MGHL58*, 332-351.

8 "The Life of Richard Turpin." *LAMNH59*, 3-20.

9 "The Life of Richard Turpin, the famous Highwayman, with an Account of his most memorable Exploits." *BR64*, III:134-163.

10 "The Trial of Richard Turpin, the noted Highwayman; with a particular Account of his many of Exploits." *TC68*, III:99-122.

11 "The Trial of Richard Turpin, the noted Highwayman; with a particular Account of many of his exploits." *VANM76*, III:10-26.

12 "The Trial of Richard Turpin, the noted Highwayman; with a particular Account of many of his Exploits." *MOBC88*, II:298-319.

13 "A full Account of the Life and Transactions of the famous Richard Turpin, who was hanged at York, for Horse-Stealing." *JNCN95*, II:331-348.

14 "The following Robberies were committed by Rose, Wheeler, Schooling, Walker, Turpin, and Gregory, all of whom except Wheeler the evidence, and Turpin, are hanging in Chains near Edgware, in Middlesex" *SIAL60*, II:344-360.

15 *OBP* February 1735 (t17350226-45), February 1735 (t17350226-46), and May 1735 (t17350522-20).

16 "A full Account of the Life and Transactions of the famous Richard Turpin, who was hanged for Horse-stealing." *MR79*, II:331-348.

chivalrous and heroic highwayman, appears to have been a nineteenth-century phenomenon first prompted by the early nineteenth-century publication of *The Life and Trial of Richard Turpin*,[17] and brought to its peak in 1834 with William Ainsworth's *Rookwood*.

Although reliable sources on Turpin's life are scarce (partly because the highwayman went into hiding on several occasions, going so far as to change his name), the following biography can be recovered from legal, parochial and journalistic accounts. Richard Turpin was baptised at Hempstead, Essex, in 1705. He was given a short education and placed as an apprentice to a butcher. Upon finishing his apprenticeship, he married Elizabeth Millingdon, a maidservant. The couple remained in Essex, where Turpin set up as a butcher, and acted as a fence to a gang of deer-stealers headed by Samuel Gregory. He soon joined them, and by late 1734 the Gregory gang turned to violent housebreaking, focusing on the outskirts of London.[18] Rewards for their capture were advertised in the newspapers,[19] and a number of them were tried and condemned in February 1735, as their youngest member turned evidence against them.[20]

The remaining members of the gang had separated by May 1736, and Turpin disappeared completely, among rumours that he had escaped to Ireland or the Netherlands. He took up with another highwayman, Matthew King, and narrowly escaped arrest when King was shot and captured in an ambush in May 1737; King later died from his wounds. Having killed one of the men trying to seize him, Turpin fled to Yorkshire. He then took to horse-stealing, robbing horses in Lincolnshire and selling them in Yorkshire, incidentally

17 *The Life and Trial of Richard Turpin, A notorious Highwayman. Containing A particular Account of his Adventures, from his Being first put an Apprentice to a Butcher in Whitechapel to his Execution at York for Horse-stealing. To which is added, The Life of Sawney Beane, The Man Eater* (London: Printed by T. Maiden, Sherbourne-Lane, For Ann Lemoine, White-Rose-Courst, Coleman-Street, and J. Roe, No. 90, Houndsditch, [1800?]).

18 Derek Barlow, "Turpin, Richard [Dick] (bap. 1705, d. 1739)"*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008).

19 *London Gazette*, Feb. 8-11, 1735.

20 *OBP* (t17350226-45, & t17350226-46).

involving his unknowing father, who spent several months in prison for receiving a stolen horse, in his illegal activities. Dick was arrested in York for disturbing the peace in October 1738, under the name of John Palmer or Pawmen, and finally indicted for horse-stealing. He was identified as Turpin thanks to a letter he wrote to his brother-in-law, asking for his help in the impending trial. One of his former teachers allegedly recognised his handwriting on this letter (his brother-in-law refused to pay the postal charges) and alerted the authorities.[21] Turpin was tried and convicted in March, and finally executed on April 7, 1739.[22]

In this chapter, I first explore Turpin's relationship with a very particular type of object, animals, in the most influential of his biographies, the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*, and situate his relationship with animals within the narrative's larger focus on Turpin's challenge to normative domestic relations. Second, I focus on issues of property surrounding Turpin himself, as a theatrical, medical and literary object embedded within multifaceted disputes over ownership of moveable things. Whereas, in biographies of London criminals, the movement of stolen objects is controlled by the thief, and confined to very particular legal and criminal circles, in the horse-thief's narrative, not only can the booty move on its own, but the thief lacks access as he travels through criminal circuits. As a result, we see Turpin himself become increasingly immobile, sheltered from the law by his family but also unable to circulate within non-criminal spaces. I argue that, through both his geographical, professional and literary location, the figure of the highwayman is isolated and marginalised. Lacking the social and criminal structures provided by the London underworld, Turpin must build his status through a family-like association of criminals, and hence domesticity permeates the narrative. Defined by his

21 *Lancashire Journal*, Mar. 5, 1739.

22 For a detailed and painstakingly researched biography of Turpin, see Derek Barlow's *Dick Turpin and the Gregory Gang* (London: Phillimore, 1973).

horse and mobility, the highwayman intrinsically differs from the types of the London criminals, both in his life-story and his post-mortem status as a commodity. Matters of belonging thus function differently in the accounts of Turpin's life as criminal sociability is built upon a subversion of the family unit instead of a subversion of polite society.

Disputes over the ownership of the criminal life among authors, booksellers and publishers are not limited to Turpin or highwaymen. They occur in many forms in biographies of other felons. However, due to the location of his trial and execution, Turpin escapes the usual modes of literary and penal ownership displayed over London criminals. Without the affordance of the Newgate stage, on which his fame would have secured a highly ritualised hanging in front of a large audience, Turpin takes control of the theatricality of his own execution. His provincial demise also challenges the usual outlets for the criminal as a literary object. There is no *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of his last days, no *Old Bailey Proceedings* of his trial, and no publication of his biography or dying speech from the usual sources. Instead, Turpin becomes a disputed object for two competitive printers, eager to bank on the highwayman's fame.

V.1 Animals and humans

Although Turpin also dealt with more commonplace possessions in his thieving activities, his choice of criminal career continually involves him with one very particular type of belonging: animals. Highwaymen, or high-pads, were differentiated by their use of horses from footpad, who also preyed on travellers on deserted roads: the highwayman is defined by B.E.'s *New Dictionary ... of the Canting Crew* (1699) as “a highway robber, well-mounted and well-armed”. Horses allow thieves to be particularly mobile, and are thus an integral part of the highwaymen's tale. As a former butcher turned poacher, highwayman, and finally horse-thief, Turpin is constantly involved with animals, whether

they represent his livelihood, his equipment, or his booty. Live animals, and particularly horses, play an important part in the Turpin narratives: the cave in which Turpin and King live for three years is made big enough to conceal their horses, which remain with them notwithstanding that, being well sheltered from view yet able to survey the road from their habitation, the thieves may actually not have needed horses at all. Turpin was tried for horse stealing (a mare and a foal, as well as a black gelding, and he was suspected to have stolen many others); and he was first arrested because he shot at one of his landlord's cocks in the street.[23] Livestock form a unique type of mobile property, their worth dictated by an array of elements, from their location (deer and hares living on an estate are considered property of the owner, although they are not generally bought or sold through legal channels), to their age, their traits and abilities or even their relationship to their owners. The highwayman's professional success depended on his ability to control and direct some of these living things. However, they also represent a constant danger, as failure to control them efficiently results not only in financial hardship, but, in Turpin's case, even death. Turpin's inability to gain complete control over these objects, or failure to alienate them from their owner enough to turn them into unrecognisable things, ultimately lead to his demise.

In the Turpin narratives, animals fulfill three basic roles: they can be a commodity to buy, sell or steal; a means of transport; or a mode of identification. This third function is particularly important in these texts, as horses become additional identifiers. According to the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman*, the Gregory gang are thus arrested after an innkeeper recognises their horses.[24] Recognition – and hence proof of ownership – is indispensable to incriminate thieves. During his career as a horse-thief, Turpin attempts to sever the link between the objects of his thefts and their

23 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 11 & 13.
24 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 6.

subjects, or owners, by geographically removing them from their property: he thus steals in one region, and sells in another. This method is reasonably successful in the absence of a centralised policing system, but depends on the thief's local reputation and unobtrusiveness. Once this geographical barrier fails, the victim can regain control over the stolen animal through a process of identification involving a precise description of the animal. Knowledge of the animal's physical features enables not only restitution, but also punishment of the criminal through a web of testimonies from former owner, purchaser and incidental witnesses. The *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* shows that much of the evidence was based on the abilities of the former owners to identify their stolen animals:

> Court. Describe their Marks. Crea. She was a Black Mare, blind of the near Eye, having a little White on the near Forefoot, and also the near Hind-Foot, a little above the Hoof, and scratch'd, (greased) on both the Hind-Feet, and the near Fore-Foot, with I's, or Marks resembling that Letter, burnt on the near Shoulder, and a Star on the Forehead.[25]

This level of detail is made possible by the owner's long relationship with his animal; later the court is told that he had her for over ten years.[26] His description is corroborated by witnesses, who attest to his right, and to having seen, or been offered such an animal by Turpin, providing proof both of ownership and theft. On the other hand, the description of the foal is extremely short, and confined to one sentence, “it was a black Ball”.[27] Property over the animal is thus established through recognition, in much the same manner as for other types of property. With an easily recognisable booty, marked in its very flesh with the stamp of its owners (the 'I' branded in the mare's shoulder), horse-stealing remains a risky

25 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 5.
26 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 6.
27 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 6. Blackball: “A waxy preparation, moulded into a ball, used to give a shining black surface to boots and shoes” (*OED*). In this context, it describes the colour of the foal, which is predominantly black. Note that this is not a common descriptor for a horse in eighteenth-century texts, where 'black ball' or 'blackball' overwhelmingly designates the mixture of wax, animal fat and black pigments used to maintain and condition black leather. Possibly a variation of the terms 'piebald' and 'skewbald', which are applied to horses with large white patches in their coats.

venture, as it is personal and durable enough for the owner to describe in detail, and thus regain control over their lost property.

One way for the criminal to keep control over his booty is by making it unrecognisable. The butchering trade provides a perfect cover for livestock theft, as the animal is not only killed, losing much of its value and becoming irretrievable, but its dismembered and skinned flesh is also unrecognisable and always in demand. However, Turpin's greed betrays him, as he attempts to monetise the only recognisable part of the animal, their hide. The *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin* thus describes his early thefts and their consequences:

> he was reduced to a Necessity of maintaining himself by indirect Practices, and accordingly very often used to rob the neighbouring Gentlemen of Sheeps, Lambs, Oxen & particularly one Time he stole a couple of Oxen from Mr. Giles ... which he had conveyed to his own House and cut up, but he was detected by two of the Gentleman's Servants, who having a Suspicion of him..., in order to be farther assured, enquired where Turpin sold the Hides of his Beasts …. They went there, and were convinc'd on sight of the Hides, that Turpin was the Man who had stole the Oxen.... [Turpin made his escape and], when he was gone, his Wife dispos'd of the Carcasses.[28]

Turpin becomes a full-time criminal after this early incident in his life, which prompts him to join the Gregory gang. The hide of the stolen animals is used to identify both thief and stolen goods, in a manner similar to the way that we have seen the theft of clothing operated in biographies of other criminals.[29] The animals stolen by Turpin are thus a peculiar type of object, their mobility and vulnerability to change influencing both the manner in which they are identified, and the manner in which they are stolen and disposed of. They must either go through a violent – and final – decrease of value in order to reenter the legal market, or be geographically distanced from their former owners in order to maintain their original worth. As a butcher, Turpin has the means to break the link between living objects and their owning subjects in a manner much more efficient than a fence

28 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 3.
29 See the discussion of Sheppard's disguises in chapter III (82-85).

would normally do: not only can he make the stolen objects altogether unrecognisable, but his very trade also results in their complete disappearance.

However, livestock are not the only living things in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin.* Turpin is described attempting to gain control over uncooperative victims by dehumanising them through referring to them as animals: as Turpin laments the loss of his companion, King, he later also insults Mr. Bayes, who was responsible for his arrest: “I shot poor King in endeavouring to kill that Dog”.[30] Likening people to dogs, an insult which is understood as lowering the recipient in their social status, is a recurrent practice in *The Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman.* Thus, during King and Turpin's first meeting and as Turpin attempts to rob him, King responds by likening both himself and Turpin to canines, highlighting their precarious social position but also the innate solidarity which emerges from it. Exclaiming “What! Dog eat Dog?”,[31] King continues to call Turpin 'brother' and proposes an alliance between the two highwaymen. The derogatory term 'dog' here serves two purposes. On the one hand, it dehumanises, and hence highlights the highwaymen's position as outsiders. On the other hand, it creates solidarity between the two criminals, identifying them as members of the same group, united in their relationship with stolen objects, and low social status.

This process of dehumanisation, turning people into animals, also comes to be applied to Turpin himself in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*. He then becomes a hunted creature to pursuers eager to deliver him to the courts. Having lost his accomplice, his booty, and

> being drove from [his cave], he sculk'd about the Woods, and was once very near being taken, when Mr. Ives the King's Huntsman, took out two dry footed Hounds to find him out; but he perceiving them coming, got up in a Tree, and seeing them go underneath him, was then so terrify'd at it, that he took a Resolution of going away that Instant.[32]

30 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 13.
31 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 10.
32 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 13.

Turpin becomes the fleeing animal, chased by hounds and hunter. His association with animal prey is cemented later in the *Genuine History*, by a play on Turpin's own name. His encounter with a man hoping to receive the reward for his capture is described thus: “Turpin was unarmed, standing alone, and, not knowing the Man, took him for one Poaching for Hares, and told him, He would get no Hares near that Thicket; No, says the Fellow, but I have got a Turpin”.[33] This response plays on an antiquated meaning of the word 'turpin', which, according to the OED, was a rather rare Middle English “ fanciful name for, or appellation of, the hare.” Where other criminals become objectified through their interaction with the judicial system which takes control over their bodies as they become property of the jail and the executioner, Turpin's objectification begins even before his incarceration, and the attempts to bring him to court over his criminal activities are the site of a dehumanising hunting metaphor. Maintaining control over his own body thanks to his escapes, Turpin the fugitive nonetheless enters in a process of dehumanisation, aimed at turning him into a legal object.

Turpin's relationship with living objects, whether animals or objectified human, is thus characterised by fateful losses of control. The criminal himself becomes his specialised booty, as the poacher becomes hunted and is further alienated from mainstream society. This isolation, created both by his choice of profession and by the scope of his activities, has a strong influence on the rogue's own belonging to the criminal underworld.

V.2 Domesticity and belonging

The Turpin narratives differ greatly from accounts of London criminals in their approach to the social structures surrounding the thieves. Where London rogues are represented as circulating in a hierarchical alternate society, complete with its own rules

33 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 11.

and language, thieves operating beyond the capital are understood to lack such an organised criminal underworld. While just as important to the criminal's life, matters of belonging thus function differently in the accounts of Turpin's life, and criminal sociability is built upon a subversion of the family unit, as opposed to a subversion of polite society.

One of the main features of this criminal 'family' is the regular presence of Elizabeth Turpin. The female companions of criminals such as Blueskin or Sheppard are themselves full-time members of London's criminal circles and often condemned for their pernicious influence upon the young impoverished men they introduce to illegal trades. Turpin's wife, by contrast, is presented as a protective force, helping her husband in the background while keeping up an appearance of respectability or at least living within the law. Although she was imprisoned once because of her relationship with the Gregory gang, she was released without charge, and went on to support her husband's and King's isolated way of life, serving as the link between the hidden criminals and the outside world. Far from being an object or a burden, she is credited for enabling Turpin to escape arrest, and is also responsible for supplying most domestic necessities in a life on the run. Turpin's wife thus becomes a powerful secondary character in the fictionalised portions of the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman*,[34] before slipping into obscurity in its description of his trial and execution.

Elizabeth Millingdon or, as stated incorrectly in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman*, Elizabeth Palmer,[35] a servant girl, married Turpin as he finished his apprenticeship as a butcher. Where the *Trial Of the Notorious*

34 The text uses a medley of different sources, from newspaper articles to trial proceedings. However, the account it gives of Turpin's time with Matthew King is completely undocumented, giving rise to rumours that he had fled to Ireland or the Netherlands. That portion of the text is most clearly fictionalised.

35 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 3. 'Palmer', or 'Parmen' was the fake name Turpin used in Yorkshire, which origin is probably linked to his own mother's maiden name, 'Parmenter'. Although the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* traces the origin of this pseudonym back to Turpin's mother, it sheds no light on this misattribution of his wife's maiden name.

Highwayman Richard Turpin remains mostly silent on Turpin's wife, she is an important, if unobtrusive, presence in the early parts of *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman*, where she features as a particularly potent companion, a reverse fence, linking the criminal and law-abiding society and markets. She is not only able to prevent her husband's arrest, but also manages to support his move from fence to smuggler financially: “He immediately form'd a Design of commencing Smuggler; for which Reason, his Wife having supplied him with what small Matter of Money she could raise, he took his way to the Hundreds of Essex”.[36] Where the Sheppard narratives turn their female characters into objects to be manipulated or handled by their criminal hero, the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* describes an unusual female presence, proving just as competent as her more famous husband. When King and Turpin find themselves too well-known to live in town, they retreat to a cave close by a road, which provides them with a steady supply of potential victims: “In this Cave they liv'd, eat [sic], drank and lay; Turpin's Wife supplied them with Victuals, and frequently stay'd there all Night”.[37] Turpin's wife is here acting as a fence, the only link between the isolated criminals and the law-abiding members of society. She is not only able to remain inconspicuous despite being at least known to the authorities as Turpin's acquaintance, but she also succeeds in monetising the pair's booty. She even appropriates the highwaymen's mobility, as both King and Turpin must remain in the cave while she travels to sell the stolen goods and purchase necessary items.

Elizabeth Turpin altogether disappears from the narrative following King's capture, a break which is accompanied by a stylistic change in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman.* The section of the text dealing with Turpin's time in Yorkshire, his arrest, trial and execution, makes extensive use of textual and official

36 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 4.
37 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 10-11.

sources, such as notes and testimonies from his trial, official correspondence, family letters, and news reports. Elizabeth receives brief mention in a passage detailing his final arrangements, where she undergoes a complete transformation from useful female companion to abandoned spouse and mother: “He also left a Gold Ring and two Pair of Shoes and Clogs to a married Woman at Brough,[38] that he was acquainted with; though he at the same time acknowledg'd he had a Wife and Child of his own”.[39] The *Genuine History*'s treatment of Elizabeth Turpin is thus heavily reliant on the narrative's relation to its own sources. While she is described as a resourceful secondary character in the more clearly fictionalised segments of the texts, she is altogether ignored in those segments which follow the more formal conventions of trial proceedings. However, and unlike most secondary female characters in biographies of famous male criminals, she is not reduced to a mere prop in the *Genuine History* and continues to figure in later collections of criminal biographies overwhelmingly adapted from this text.

Other members of Turpin's family also feature in both the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* and, to a lesser extent, the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin*,[40] especially in those passages where copies of letters allegedly exchanged between Turpin and several members of his family are included in both texts. Although the publication of letters supposed to have been sent or received by famous criminals was not unusual,[41] the letters found in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* are particularly interesting. It

38 Brough was one of Turpin's places of residence while in Yorkshire.

39 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* 1739 (20) and *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 21.

40 The *Trial* only contains one letter, from Turpin's father to his son, informing him of the steps taken to appeal his sentence, and advising him to “beg of God to Pardon [his] many transgressions.” *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), viii. The *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman*, 18-19, on the other hand contains four letters, from Turpin to his father, and to his brother-in-law and from his father, to each of his sons.

41 See for example the multiple letters between John Sheppard, his mother, his accomplice Joseph Blake alias Blueskin, and the executioner published in the London newspapers covering his escapes during the summer of 1724.

reproduces a selection of the correspondence between the Turpin family following his imprisonment at York Castle, including the letter that provoked the discovery of his real identity. The family's involvement in Turpin's illegal activities is not limited to their attempts to change his sentence. Indeed, he also got his father in trouble when involving him in his horse-thieving business without the latter's complicity. The father spent several months in prison as a result. The brother-in-law unwittingly betrays Turpin also, as it is his refusal to pay for the postage of his letter asking for his help in building a character which initiates the series of events leading to Dick's identification as Turpin, and the discovery of his horse-stealing practices. Turpin does not get to build his character; he was apparently convinced that he should be sent back to Essex for his trial, and so did not provide any witnesses during the trial at York.[42]

Interest in these rather unexceptional letters sparks from the events which identified the little-known John Palmer as the famous Dick Turpin, for whose capture a sizeable reward had been promised and advertised as early as 1734.[43]This fateful letter, requesting his brother-in-law's help in securing witnesses to his character for the upcoming trial, was refused upon delivery, as, not knowing anyone in York, the recipient declined to pay for the postage.[44] It was later intercepted at the post office by James Smith, who had taught Dick Turpin to write as a child, and whose father happened to have employed Elizabeth as a maid before her wedding. Recognising the handwriting, he alerted the authorities, and was later a witness at his trial.[45] Turpin's demise is thus enabled by the link between this

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42 For more on the importance of character in eighteenth-century courts, see my next chapter, on James Maclaine.

43 The first reward of £50 was part of an effort to dismantle the Gregory gang. It was later increased to £200, as Turpin was wanted not only for theft, but also for murder. *London Gazette*, Feb. 22-25, 1735 and June 21-25, 1737.

44 In itself, this refusal is rather strange. Turpin did keep in touch with his family during his time in Yorkshire, as evidenced by his father's arrest in 1738 for unknowingly keeping one of the horses stolen by his son (Barlow, “Turpin, Richard [Dick] [bap. 1705, d. 1739]”), and by the letter's signature, which points to his family's awareness of his pseudonym. This letter ends with a rather enigmatic cry for help. “for Heaven's sake, dear Brother, don't neglect me, you'll know what I mean when I say, I am yours, John Palmer.” *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 19.

45 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 11-14.

object and its subject as designated by the handwriting. Once out of his control, the letter becomes evidence thanks to its obvious connection to its subject, as the thief, specialised in manipulating and appropriating objects from their subjects, finds himself the victim of a similar, but legal, separation and appropriation by the court. Turpin loses control over the meaning of a letter designed to secure his freedom but turned to incriminating material.

Turpin's family is involved in the vicissitudes of his criminal career. However, the highwayman's close relationships are not limited to blood ties, as the criminal world in which he circulates is also described in familial terms. The highwayman and his accomplices organise themselves in a gang, complete with honour code and group solidarity. Turpin emerges as an organising force behind this social structure, as, according to the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*, the group later known as the Gregory gang goes from mere deer-stealing to housebreaking under Turpin's initiative:

> no sooner had he left off Smuggling than he met with a Gang of Deer-stealers who ... made no Scruple of admitting him to be One of them. ... [They] followed Deer-stealing only for some time, but beginning to be too well known ... they form'd themselves into a Body by Turpin's Directions, and resolv'd to [become housebreakers].[46]

Thus allegedly controlled by one of their newest members, the newly-formed gang adopts the principles of a brotherhood, sharing their booty equally between all its members whether they were all present during the robbery or not, and supporting each other, at times violently, in their personal battles and grievances. Instigated by Turpin, the gang then carries out a punishing expedition against the keeper of Epping Forest, William Mason. While an inebriated Turpin missed the rendezvous and hence did not participate in the break-in, the rest of the gang nevertheless attacked Mason in his name, violently beating the keeper and destroying most of his belonging.[47] However, this system of support soon crumbles, as the thieves hide their personal gains from each other, ultimately leading to

46 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 4.
47 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 4.

their betrayal by one resentful member, John Wheeler: “Although ... they got about £26 in Money ..., yet they made no fair Distribution of it amongst themselves, for to[sic] Wheeler the Evidence, who was set to watch Mr. Lawrence and his Servants, ... his Companions pretended, they had only got three Guineas”.[48]

Following the dissolution of the gang, a penniless Turpin decides to strike out on his own, or, as the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin* puts it, “to go on his own bottom”. This resolution does not last, however, as he soon meets a fellow highwayman, Matthew King, with whom he develops a close partnership. In the *Genuine History*, their relationship is built from the onset on the similarity of their illegal activities, as belonging to the criminal world instantly designates them as allies. Threatened by Turpin on a lonely road, King exclaims: “Come, come, Brother Turpin, if you don't know me, I know you, and should be glad of your Company”.[49] The contrast between law-abiding circles and criminal society which brings King and Turpin together is further reflected in descriptions of the highwaymen's domestic arrangements:

> King [and Turpin] being very well known about the Country ... insomuch that as no House would entertain them, they then formed the Design of making their Cave, and to that Purpose pitch'd upon a Place enclos'd with a large Thicket ... ; here they made a Place large enough to receive them and their Horses[50]

Unlike the London criminals, who can retreat to a liminal underworld and whose fame increases their interactions with the criminal and lower classes, the famous highwaymen are efficiently isolated from the law-abiding world, and are completely dependent on Turpin's wife, who can still pass as an innocent citizen. Without the anonymity provided by the city, Turpin and King withdraw into a close familial unit and a completely alternative lifestyle, while their only point of contact with the outside world is through their criminal activities. Their cave thus functions as a home in the *Genuine History*, and is completely

48 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 8.
49 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), both 10.
50 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* 1739 (10-11).

devoid of any riches or booty; instead, it only contains a few necessities, painting the image of a rather dismal way of life. With King arrested and Turpin on the run and unable to return to this place of safety, the cave is discovered: “when they found his Cave, there was in it two Shirts in a Bag, two Pair of Stockings, Part of a Bottle of Wine, and some Ham”.[51]

This close partnership between Turpin and King is however violently destroyed, as the theft of a famous racehorse brings about the latter's capture and death, allegedly caused by the former's poor aim. Following this incident, Turpin despairs: “What shall I do? Where shall I go? D—n that Dick Bayes, I'll be the Death of him; for I have lost the best Fellow-Man I ever had in my Life.”[52] This clearly fictional expostulation (Turpin is supposedly alone when he utters this, and the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*'s declared source is Richard Bayes, and not Turpin himself) supports the treatment of King and Turpin as a kind of kin, as the unlucky accomplice is passionately mourned.

Turpin thus operates within an alternate, and isolated, family unit. This treatment does not allow for the satire against society at large which is usually present in criminal biographies, in which thieves and prostitutes mock and mimic the upper class way of life, but the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* nonetheless features the subversion, and even destruction, of domestic values. The Gregory gang's thieving method, which is closer to a home invasion than a break-in such as those operated by Sheppard and Blueskin, is rooted in violence. The gang members gain entry to the houses by threatening its inhabitants, beat them, and generally destroy everything in their wake.[53] The gang thus does not simply separate portable objects from their rightful

51 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 13.
52 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 13.
53 The *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman*'s description of the break-ins follows the testimony of the victims found in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* quite closely, and this violence is far from fictional. The Gregory gang used intimidation in order to force the homeowners to divulge where they kept their valuables, and were quite comfortable with rape, burning, and violent beatings. *OBP* (t17350226-45, 17350226-46, & t17350522-20).

subjects; they also destroy those objects which they cannot, or do not want to, carry. Where Sheppard desecrates and attacks his victim's home, the Gregory gang's mode of housebreaking altogether destroys it: during the Mason robbery, the gang “having first bound themselves in an oath not to leave one whole piece of Goods in the House [and] having broke open the door, they beat and abused Mason .... and broke everything they could lay Hands on”.[54] They also ransack several other houses in their search for hidden cash during their break-ins. This display of violence, which is instigated by Turpin according to the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*, is a thorough attack not only on the owners, but also on their property and chattels. For this gang, merely turning objects into things through theft is not sufficient; the objects must instead be completely obliterated, in a violent assault against the domestic haven.

Moreover, conventional domesticity is not attacked only through the destruction of goods, but also through consumption in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*. During several home invasions, as they stumble upon some particularly appetising provisions, the gang forces its victims to perform familiar domestic rituals with them: “[The gang] came to the Door of Mr. Saunders, a wealthy farmer [and] enquired if [he] was at home; being answered he was, the Door, being opened, they all rush'd in, went directly to the Parlour, where Mr. Saunders, his Wife, and some Friends were at Cards.” They reassure them that no harm will come to them, and ransack the house, then “Finding in their search some bottles of wine, a bottle of brandy and mince-pies; they all sat down, drank a bottle of wine, eat [sic] a mince-pie, and obliged the company to drink a dram of brandy each”.[55] The thieves thus engage in a mockery of the farmer household's easy conviviality, forcing the frightened family to participate in their mimicry of domestic life.

Another instance of such behaviour is found in the description of the (extremely

54 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 5.
55 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 5-6.

violent) Lawrence robbery, during which they pillage the house, beat the owner and threaten to cut his throat and limbs, break his skull with their pistols and rape one of the servants. They then force the servants to engage in another hospitality ritual: “meeting with a bottle of Elder Wine, they took it, and oblig'd the servants to drink twice of it”.[56] While this particular ritual is not as clearly directed against the domestic mores of the propertied victims as that of the Saunders robbery above, its focus on the servants, coupled with the particularly vicious attack on the homeowner, points to the thieves' own perception of their social standing. Circulating not only outside of law-abiding sociability, but also of more organised criminal circles, the gang's attack on affluent farmsteads is motivated not just by material gain, but also serves to confirm and consolidate the thieves' membership of lower, and hence poorer, social classes. The highwaymen's exclusion from both mainstream and criminal societies, forcing them to construct an alternate and isolated family unit, results in the subversion of, or indeed an outright attack on, habitual domesticity.

V.3 Execution and theatre

While the Turpin narratives depart from the typical concerns of criminal biography, substituting attacks on domesticity for the more usual mock-heroic satire on the foibles of eighteenth-century polite society, they remain quite conventional in their treatment of the criminal's imprisoned body and execution. Thus, and from the moment of his imprisonment, Turpin becomes a property of the legal system, as exemplified by this order from the court to his jailors, reproduced in both the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin* and the *Trial of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin*: “To the Master, or Keeper, of the House of Correction in Beverley; ...These are ... to command you, to receive

56 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 7.

into Custody the Body of the said John Palmer [alias Turpin], and him lately keep".[57] His worth reduced to that of his body, and at risk of dissection following his execution, the highwayman prepares for death by ensuring his remains will be interred and protected by his (paid) mourners. Both biographies also report that

> The Grave was dug very deep, and the Persons whom he appointed his Mourners ... took all possible Care to secure the Body; notwithstanding which on Tuesday Morning, about three o'Clock, some Persons[58] were discover'd to be moving off the Body, which they had taken up; and the Mob having got scent where it was carried to, and suspecting it was to be anatomiz'd, went to a Garden in which it was deposited, and brought away the Body through the Streets of the City, in a Sort of Triumph, almost naked, being only laid on a Board, cover'd with some Straw, and carried on four Men's Shoulders, and buried in the same Grave, having first filled the Coffin with slack'd Lime.[59]

As it does for other popular criminals, control over Turpin's body becomes the site of a struggle between the surgeons and the mob, its members combined and dehumanised through this hunting metaphor (they have "got scent"). Reclaimed by the riotous members of the lower-classes who form the anonymous mob, Turpin as object is given a last procession in the streets of York, and is further protected from the threat of dissection through an acceptable mean of destruction.

This last spectacle is preceded, from his first imprisonment through to his execution, by a theatrical performance orchestrated by the highwayman himself, who attempts to subvert the show in his favour. Lacking the highly ritualised stage of Tyburn, Turpin takes

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57 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 13-14, and *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), iv-v.

58 The alleged grave robbers were indicted in May 1739, *Country Journal or The Craftsman*, May 26, 1739.

59 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 20, and *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 21. A byproduct of limestone, slaked lime, or calcium hydroxide, was, and still is, commonly used by builders and as a fertiliser. Roberr A. Dodgshon, "Land Improvement in Scottish Farming: Marl and Lime in Roxburghshire and Berwickshire in the Eighteenth Century " *The Agricultural History Review* 26:1 (1978), 1-2. Although contemporary popular misconceptions often couple lime and accelerated corpse decomposition, it has been linked to "preservation rites for physical resurrection in early Christianity, but also ...to disposal practices associated with safeguarding against disease and contagion". Recent studies indicate that "lime retards the rate of decomposition if present in a burial environment" and essentially desiccates the tissue it covers. Eline M.J. Schotsmans, John Denton, Jessica Dekeirsschieter, Tatiana Ivaneanu, Sarah Leentjes, Rob C. Janaway, & Andrew S. Wilson, "Effects of hydrated lime and quicklime on the decay of buried human remains using pig cadavers as human body analogues" *Forensic Science International* 217 (2012), 50 & 58. Such a process would render the body unsuitable for dissection.

active steps to control his execution, turning it from an entertainment to a solemn procession through sartorial appearance and human props:

> A few Days before his Execution, he bought himself a new Fustian Frock and a Pair of Pumps, in order to take his leave of the World in as decent a Manner as he possibly could …. The Morning before [his] Execution he gave 3l 10s amongst five Men, who were to follow the Cart as Mourners, with Hatbands and Gloves, and gave Gloves and Hatbands to several Persons more …. He was carried in a Cart to the Place of Execution...; he behav'd himself with amazing Assurance, and bow'd to the Spectators as he pass'd: It was remarkable that as he mounted the ladder, his right Leg trembled, on which he stamp'd it down with an Air, and with undaunted Courage look'd round about him, and after speaking near Half an Hour to the Topsman, threw himself off the Ladder, and expired in about five Minutes.[60]

This description, which found its way from the *London Evening Post* to both the *Genuine History* and the *Trial*, is further detailed in another newspaper, the *Daily Gazetteer*, which notes that "when he came to the Place of Execution, he stripp'd off his Cloaths, and dressed himself in a Suit of white Dimmity".[61] Turpin uses meaningful articles of clothing in order to transform the ride in the cart into a funeral cortege, complete with followers in mourning costume. The idea of the scaffold as a stage and the condemned as an actor embodied in Turpin's behaviour as he bows to his audience before taking the leap is unsurprisingly well exploited in the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin*, whose narrator sets out to describe how the highwayman "went off the stage".[62]

Turpin thus utilises significant sartorial objects in order to subvert the meaning of his execution from a display of the power of the law over the bodies of criminals, to a grim funeral procession for the condemned man. The care taken to appear decent, the change into a white suit of clothes, and finally the show of boldness in the face of death are all part

60 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 20, and *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 21. This description was originally published by the *London Evening Post*, Apr. 12-14, 1739 and was reproduced in its entirety in both the *Genuine History* and the *Trial*.

61 *Daily Gazetteer*, Apr. 14, 1739. According to the *OED*, dimity was "a stout cotton fabric, woven with raised stripes or fancy figures; usually employed undyed for beds and bedroom hangings, and sometimes for garments."

62 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 19.

of his attempt to appropriate the significance of the execution in his favour. In her article "Martyrs in Low-Life? Dying 'Game' in Augustan England," Andrea McKenzie explores the mechanisms through which some condemned men attempted to manipulate their execution into a vindication of their faith and guiltlessness. Jumping off the ladder was thus not an unusual feat: according to McKenzie, "many criminals believed that they could demonstrate their innocence by dying boldly and in a way that implied their consent — that is, by leaping from the ladder or cart".[63] By taking on the role of the bold highwayman and turning his punishment into a funeral rite, Turpin declares his sinlessness, and confidence in the afterlife. He also takes pains to control his physical reactions, such as the shaking leg which could be construed as a show of cowardice, in order to deliver a performance of complete fearlessness.

However, this carefully planned spectacle fails to portray Turpin as a repentant, and hence saved, felon convincingly. The *York Courant* reports: "Richard Turpin and John Stead were executed ... Stead behav'd very penitent, but Turpin behav'd with the greatest Assurance and Boldness to the very last".[64] While Stead's behaviour is commended, Turpin's lack of remorse is condemned. The *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* also describes his behaviour prior to his execution: "Turpin being committed Prisoner to York Castle ... liv'd in as much Pleasure as the Liberties of the Prison would afford, eating, drinking and carousing, with any Body that would spend their Time with him".[65] Such festivities are confirmed by the *Lancashire Journal*, which estimates that "the Gaoler has made 100l. by selling Liquors to him and his Visitors."[66] While this bold behaviour could be construed as proof of the criminal's readiness to face death, it was more commonly criticised as a symptom of the criminal's lack of breeding

63 McKenzie, "Martyrs in Low Life?", 196.
64 *York Courant*, Apr. 10, 1739. The same report was also reproduced in *London Evening Post*, Apr. 12-14, 1739.
65 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 19.
66 *Lancashire Journal*, Apr. 2, 1739.

and of his social ambitions. According to Andrea McKenzie,

> after about the first third of the eighteenth century this critical discourse focused increasingly on his incapacity for reason and his want of sensibility …. The game criminal's courage, or hardiness rather, was the product of mere brutish instinct, as empty as his pretensions to being a gentleman …. His behavior had always been dismissed by detractors as inappropriately bold and cheerful: by the mid-eighteenth century, however, his courage was increasingly portrayed as a species of social pretension; his words and gestures, increasingly divorced from the religious frame of reference that had once lent them meaning and force.[67]

Turpin's attempt to regain control over his own narrative through his sartorial and theatrical performance during his execution thus plays into a long, and already decried, tradition of lower-class criminal and religious beliefs and behaviour. This theatricality is however prolonged to an unusual extent through the narrative forms adopted by some of the text dealing with Turpin as an object of literature.

V.4 Turpin as a textual object

The number of biographies published following Turpin's execution is surprisingly low for such a well-known criminal. Reports of his arrest and trial were published in most London newspapers, and he was a popular attraction during his stay at York Castle. Yet there are only two original biographies, *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* and *The Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman;* the latter is the base for most accounts of his life published in later collections of criminal lives. Even the serialised biography published in the *Penny London Post or The Morning Advertiser* between December 1750 and January 1751 is a copy of the *Genuine History*. The reason behind this paucity of sources lies in the location of Turpin's trial, York. Lacking such official and lucrative publications as the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts*, which were focused on the London courts and

67 McKenzie, "Martyrs in Low Life?", 204-205.

executions, readers eager for the latest Turpin biographies depended completely on private printers' endeavours. However, without the advertisement afforded by a Tyburn execution and of their usual sources, such private ventures represented a much riskier investment for the London printers.

The first published account dedicated to Turpin, *The Trial of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* was published in York a mere ten days after his execution.[68] It comprises a shorthand record of the trial, "Taken down in court by Mr. Thomas Kyll, Professor of Short-Hand",[69] an account of his time in Yorkshire by Thomas Appleton, clerk of the peace for Yorkshire's East Ridings and hence responsible for court records, one of the letter from Turpin's father, and a biography allegedly taken from Turpin's last words to the executioner. The shorthand account, which reads as a dialogue between the Justice, Turpin, and numerous witnesses, is just over twelve pages long, no more than 2,500 words, and was recorded in one session. Although the text is presented as a complete and faithful record of the trial, it is clear from the length of the transcript that it is far from complete, as this word length could comfortably be reached in well under an hour. Moreover, while shorthand transcription was already quite efficient at the time, one shorthand writer would not be able to transcribe everything. In his discussion of the production of the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, Robert Shoemaker comments, about the famous Canning Trial,[70] that "owing to the intense public interest in Canning's trial, which demanded that every word was written down, the publisher was obliged to hire three shorthand writers ... to transcribe the

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68 Advertisements were taken out to announce the first edition in the *Daily Post*, Apr. 17, 1739, the *London Evening Post*, Apr. 19-21, 1739 and the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, Apr. 19, 1739. Plans to publish a shorthand account of the trial were already publicised in London papers a few day prior: "We hear that [Turpin's] Trial, which was taken down in Short-Hand, will soon be published." *Daily Gazetteer, London Edition*, Apr. 4, 1739.

69 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), title page.

70 Elizabeth Canning's disappearance remains the most famous criminal mystery of the eighteenth century. Her alleged kidnappers were found guilty, but Elizabeth herself was later tried for perjury amidst a raging paper war, found guilty and transported. Angus Fraser, "Canning , Elizabeth [1734–1773])", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008).

trial in order for it to be published in a separate 205-page book".[71] Thus Thomas Kyll would not have been able to record everything, and we must assume that some cuts must have been made.

The *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* is nonetheless a fascinating insight into the court's mechanisms. By refraining from summarising the witnesses' evidence to a format similar to that of the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, and instead presenting it in the form of a dialogue, the *Trial* becomes theatre. The judge's surprise, the noise from the court,[72] and the witnesses' colloquialisms are recorded:

> *Court to Mr. James Smith:* Do you know the Prisoner *Palmer* at the Bar? Look at him, and tell me what you know about him.
> *Smith*: Yes, ... I knew him ever since he was a child.
> *Cour* [sic]: What is his Name?
> *Smith*: Richard Turpin; I knew his Father, and all his Relations, and he married one of my Father's Maids.
> *Cour*: What! Was you with him frequently?
> ...
> [*Court to Mr. Edward Saward]*: Do you know this Richard Turpin?
> *Saw:* Yes ... I have known him these twenty two Years; I cannot say I know exceeding exact, but about twenty two Year, upon my Soul ...
> Here the Council reprov'd Saward, and said to him, Friend, You have sworn once already, you need not swear again.[73]

Thus, the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin*'s chosen format turns the whole trial into a performance, foreshadowing the stage of the scaffold. While the *Old Bailey Proceedings* do occasionally record excerpts of dialogues between the judge, witnesses, or accused, such detailed reports remain quite rare.[74] Presenting itself as a

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71 Robert B. Shoemaker, "The Old Bailey Proceedings and the Representation of Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century London " *Journal of British Studies* 47:3 (Jul. 2008), 566. Canning's trial lasted seven days.

72 The narrator comments in a footnote: "There was such a Noise in the Court, that the Gentleman who took down the Trial could not distinctly hear the Name of the Place; but apprehended it to be Boxhill or some such Name." *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 13.

73 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), 12-15.

74 While, during the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the *Old Bailey Proceedings* paraphrase witness testimonies, this format shifts during the 1730s, as reported discourse becomes less prevalent and instances of direct speech much more common. While such structure preserves some of the questions from the court, and is presented as the exact utterances of the witnesses, they are still clearly paraphrased and adapted for the sake of clarity and brevity, and rarely feature the types of interjections and linguistic peculiarities detailed in the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes*.

complete dialogue in spite of the inevitable discrepancies and reductions between the oral and the written word, this text mingles fact and fiction. It presents an image of the criminal both more life-like, as he is (supposedly) quoted exactly, and less reliable than more neutral representations, as the extent of the alterations, mistakes, and expunged or lost passages is nowhere addressed.

Heavily advertised in the London newspapers, the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* went through a run of five editions in the months following Turpin's execution. However, it soon acquired some competition with the publication of the more complete *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the noted Highwayman*. By contrast, this biography was the subject of a minimal publicity campaign, with a single advertisement in the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*.[75] The similarity of content between these two texts led to a small paper war between the printers, complete with accusations of piracy, downright theft, and public advertisements decrying the actions of the rival printer. Although both narratives were sold by London booksellers, the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* was commissioned by the booksellers and printers Richard Chandler and Caesar Ward. Originally located in London, these ambitious partners soon opened shops in other cities, including York. Ward was also the publisher of York's second newspaper, the *York Courant*, a position which probably enabled him to publish the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* before his rival. York was one of the very few cities outside London where the printing trade was not restricted by the Printing Acts,[76] and as such, it enjoyed a long print tradition. According to John Feather,

> The other early presses outside London were also associated with towns which had a long ecclesiastical or educational tradition ... Both Canterbury and York had presses before the middle of the sixteenth century; [maybe] as early as 1497-8 and ... certainly ... by 1509.[77]

75 *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, Apr. 23, 1739.
76 James Raven, *The Business of Books. Booksellers and the English Book Trade* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 85.
77 John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London: Routledge 2006 [1988]), 19.

On the other hand, John Standen, the printer of the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman*, restricted his activities to London, and was well-known for his sometimes dubious practices.[78]

Both biographies assert the quality of their sources from the onset. The preface of the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* thus informs the reader:

> The following Account of Turpin was communicated to the Publishers by Mr. Robert Appleford, of Beverley, Clerk of the Peace for the East-Riding of the County of York; to whose indefatigable Care and Diligence the Publick are very much oblig'd, for this notorious Offender's being brought to Justice.[79]

On the other hand, the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman* takes its narrative from Richard Bayes, a publican reputed for bringing about Matthew King's arrest by recognising a famous racehorse which had been unwittingly stolen by Turpin and his accomplice.[80] However, portions of the *Genuine History* are almost verbatim reproductions of the *Trial*'s text, especially in the sections dealing with Turpin's stay in Yorkshire. This obvious borrowing, in itself perfectly usual in eighteenth-century criminal biographies, sends Chandler and Ward into a campaign against their rival, beginning through an announcement in the newspapers:

> The great Success of this Trial has occasion'd it to be surreptitiously printed, in a very Incorrect Manner, with a Picture prefixed, as much like Turpin as the Great Mogul. The Publick are hereby caution'd against it, this being the only genuine Trial, and to be depended upon as printed in York by the Persons above-mentioned. And for those who are pleas'd with Pictures, there shall be given gratis along with it a curious Print of the late celebrated Dicky Dickenson, the humorous Governour of Scarborough Spaw. [81]

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78 He is notably involved in the war between two rival newspapers both named *The Craftsman*, about which he testified he was printer in name only. Simon Varey, "Printers as Rivals: *The Craftsman* 1739-40" *Library* 6th ser.:2 (1980), 220-222.

79 *The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes* (1739), iii.

80 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), 12.

81 Advertisement to the fourth edition of the *Trial, London Daily Post and General Advertiser,* Apr. 24, 1739. The same advertisement was also taken out in the *Daily Gazetteer,* Apr. 25, 1739, and the *York Courant,* May 1-8, 1739, for the fifth edition; the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* boasted an engraving of Turpin in his cave.

Not satisfied with the impact of this advertisement, which offers a free, yet altogether unrelated, print with each purchase, the printers take things one step further in the fifth edition of the *Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin*, aptly named *The Whole Life and Trial at Large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin*.[82] This text not only contains all the material from previous versions of the *Trial*, but also a complete copy of the text of the *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, the Noted Highwayman*, along with a new, and unapologetic preface. Beginning with a quote from the *Tatler* 101, which focuses on literary piracy, the preface directly attacks Standen:

> The Success of this Pamphlet having encouraged one J. Standen ... to pirate all Mr. Appleton's Account of Turpin in Yorkshire, with his Father's Letter to him, and the Substance of most of the Trial as taken down in Court by Mr. Thomas Kyll of the City of York, in what he calls the Genuine Life of Richard Turpin, &c. The Proprietors have no other present Way of doing themselves Justice, but by making a Reprisal, viz. In acting as they would endeavour to do with a Highwayman that had just robbed themselves; therefore they have printed the same Account verbatim; which they have prefixed to this whole Trial at Large[83]

The preface continues this comparison between literary pirates and more common criminals, describing their illegal practices: "[they] print any Book... and sell it (as all other Thieves do stolen Goods) at a cheaper Rate."[84] Standen counterattacked in his next edition of the *Genuine History*, adding an oath by one of their sources, while the other, Richard Bayes, certifies to the publick

> That [Bayes] never did communicate any Account ... of the said Richard Turpin to any other Person whatever, except only to the Person who collected his History published by John Standen.... That which is genuine,... has the Cut of Turpin concealed in his Cave, prefixed to it.[85]

The criminal is thus objectified in death, as his life becomes the site for a struggle

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82 *The Whole Life and Trial at large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, At York Assizes, on the 22d Day of March, 1739... The Fifth Edition. To which is prefix'd, A large and genuine History of the Life of Turpin, from his Birth to his Execution...* (York: Printed by Ward and Chandler Booksellers, at their Printing-Office in Coney-Street; and Sold at their Shop without Temple-Bar, London, 1739).

83 *The Whole Life and Trial at large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* (1739), Preface.

84 *The Whole Life and Trial at large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* (1739), Preface.

85 *Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin, The noted Highwayman* (1739), Preface.

between rival printers, and can be stolen, sold and monetised just like any other material possession. Criminal practices are translated into the world of publishing, as the printers attempt to stake their claim on the highwayman's life-story. The lack of the formal accounts usually provided by the Old Bailey court and the Ordinary of Newgate enables literary experimentation in the genre of the criminal trial. The Turpin narrative then turns from one of control over the criminal and witnesses' speech, to a near-theatrical rendition of what is presented as an accurate depiction of the trial. However, the structural absence of these authoritative accounts of Turpin's life also raises questions of literary ownership and piracy, as biographers struggle for control over both their texts and the criminal's life as a whole.

Turpin's relationship with objects, as well as his own status as a textual commodity, is thus governed by his geographical, professional and literary location. Devoid of the familiar structures of the London printing, legal, and criminals circles, the thief recreates not only domestic settings, but also attempts to seize control of the ritual of execution. He dedicates effort to maintaining control over his own body even after death, recognising that his post-mortem worth resides in his literary afterlife, his story turned into a commodity which can be defaced, sold and stolen. As the butcher, poacher, highwayman and horse-thief strives to maintain his control over his living booty and its circulation, his own movements become restricted, the hunter becoming prey, contained and isolated through animorphism and geographical distance:

> Full oft the South has sneer'd our Northern Clime,
> And Horse stealing been call'd a County Crime;
> But now no longer we will bear such Jokes,
> This Rogue is theirs, and we the honest Folks.
> Of Knaves and Fools, we don't say we have neither,

But Knaves and Fools are seldom found together.
Our purer Northern Air's too sharp by half,
A YORKSHIRE TIKE has bit this ESSEX CALF.
This dull-bred Rogue has found it to his Cost,
A Fish out of its Element is lost.[86]

86 "Epigram on Turpin, by a Gentleman of York" *York Courant*, Apr. 10, 1739. The same poem was also published in the *London Evening Post*, Apr. 12-14, 1739.

VI – "He needs must whom the Devil drives; I am over shoes, and must over boots" [1]
James Maclaine, the 'Gentleman Highwayman'

On his way to a preliminary hearing at which he confessed to robbing the Salisbury coach, James Maclaine,[2] or the 'Gentleman Highwayman', was "guarded by a file of Musqueteers, Hundreds of Persons through Curiosity following him; The Justice's Door was guarded by Soldiers, and his Room full of Persons of Quality and others".[3] A well-known and accepted member of the capital's polite and entertainment circles, reputedly welcomed in the houses of many women of reputation, James Maclaine became a London sensation following his arrest for highway robbery on the 27th of July 1750, which also marked his first appearance in the London newspapers. He featured in close to a hundred newspaper articles between July and December, as well as in several numbers of the *British Magazine*,[4] the *Universal Magazine*,[5] the *London Magazine*,[6] and the *Gentleman's*

1 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman, Who was executed at Tyburn on Wednesday, October 3, 1750, for a Robbery on the Highway […]* (London: Printed for Charles Corbett, at Addison's-Head, against St-Duncan's-Church, Fleetstreet, 1750), 19.

2 His last name was interchangeably spelled *Maclaine*, *Maclean* or *Macleane* in the eighteenth century. I adopt the *Maclaine* spelling here as it was preferred both by his brother, Archibald Maclaine, a Presbyterian minister at the Hague who published influential translations of theological and philosophical texts, and by the only biographer who had direct access to Maclaine during his imprisonment, Dr. Allen.

3 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman, To the Time of his Trial and receiving Sentence at the Old Bailey, containing, His Robberies, Gallantry at publick Places, with other remarkable Transactions. Together with some Account of Plunket his Companion* (London: Printed for W. Falstaff, near St. Paul's, 1750), 22.

4 John Hill (ed), "For September, 1750" & "For October, 1750" *The British Magazine for the Year 1750. Vol. V.* (London: Printed for Charles Corbett, at Addison's-Head, in Fleetstreet, 1750), 362-6 & 406-7. The first issue reproduces Maclaine's defense and the speech he intended to make after receiving a guilty verdict, while the October number provides a very short biography of the highwayman.

5 A complete biography is published in the "October 1750" number of *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure … Vol. VII. Published Monthly according to Act of Parliament* (London: By John Hinton at the Kings-Arms in St Paul Church Yard, 1750), 174-9.

6 "August 1750" ; "October 1750." *The London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer. Volume XIX. For the Year MDCCL* (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, at the Rose in Pater-Noster Row, 1750), 377-8; 465 & 475). The first number records Maclaine's arrest and features a satirical letter mourning his fate by "Dorothy Whimper", while the October issue reproduces Dr.Allen's conclusion to his account of Maclaine's last days. He is also listed amongst the other criminals who received sentence of death in the "September 1750" number (427).

Magazine[7] between August and October 1750. In addition to the *Old Bailey Proceedings*[8] of his trial and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*[9] of his life and execution, several other publications were produced following his death. As a dissenter, Maclaine received during his final days in Newgate the guidance of an external priest, Dr. Allen, instead of that of an Ordinary. Allen produced his own account of the criminal's final days, the *Account of the Behaviour of Mr. James Maclaine, from the Time of his Condemnation to the Day of his Execution*,[10] a work which mainly deals with Maclaine's spiritual state. Two single works focused on his life-story, the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman*,[11] and the *Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman*,[12] were published in the same year. Maclaine's reputation as a fortune hunter and favourite of naive young and not-so-young ladies also prompted the publication of several satirical pamphlets, such as a mock-petition for a pardon, the *Petition to the Right Hon. Mr.— In Favour of Mr. Maclean. By a Lady*[13] and a fabricated list of single London ladies, *M—c L—n's Cabinet broke open; or, His private List of all the Duchess Dowagers, Countesses, Widow Ladies, Maiden Ladies, Widows and Misses of Honour, Virtue, and large Fortunes in England*,[14] complete with a statement of intent from an Hibernian society

7 "September 1750" ; "October 1750." *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle. Volume XX. For the Year M.DCC.L. By Sylvanus Urban, Gent.* (London: Printed by Ed Cave, at St-John's Gate, 1750), 391-2 & 435-436. The first number reproduces Maclaine's defense and some letters supposedly sent to him by his brother, while the second summarises Dr. Allen's account of the criminal's life.

8 *OBP* "September 1750, trial of James Macleane" (t17500912-22).

9 *ONA* "Ordinary of Newgate's Account, October 1750" (OA17501003).

10 Rev. Dr. Allen, *An Account of the Behaviour of Mr. James Maclaine, From the Time of his Condemnation To the Day of his Execution, October 3. 1750. By the Reverend Dr. Allen, Who attended him all that time, to assist him in his Preparations for Eternity. Drawn up and published at the earnest Desire of Mr. Maclaine himself* (London: Printed for J.Noon, in Cheapside; and A. Millar, in the Strand, 1750).

11 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750).

12 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750).

13 *A Petition to the Right Hon. Mr. – , In Favour of Mr. Maclean. By a Lady.* (London: Printed for G. Smith, near Temple Bar, Fleetstreet, 1750).

14 *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open; or, His private List of all the Duchess Dowagers, Countesses, Widow Ladies, Maiden Ladies, Widows and Misses of Honour, Virtue, and Large Fortunes in England: Together With their several Places of Abodes, And also His Charge and Advice to the Honourable Society of Hibernieans: With their Orders and Resolutions*. (London: Printed for Patrick McLaughter, near St. Paul's. 1750).

of fortune hunters. Moreover, the figure of the Gentleman Highwayman was not limited to satirical material; a number of more serious pamphlets, such as the *Letter to the Honourable House of Commons, Relating to the present Situation of Affairs*,[15] also use his example to call for reform of the policing system.

Maclaine also features in later texts, such as the 1759 satirical biography of the famous courtesan Fanny Murray, mistress to the fourth Earl of Sandwich, the *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M.*[16] Maclaine's life-story is included in most publications collecting criminal lives, such as *The Tyburn Chronicle* (1768),[17] which offers a summary of the *Old Bailey Proceedings* on his trial, as well as *Select Trials* (1764),[18] the *Annals of Newgate* (1776)[19] and *The Old Bailey Chronicle* (1788),[20] all of which sport the same summarised version of the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account.* Finally, the last eighteenth-century account of Maclaine, the *Execution of Maclean, commonly known by the Name of the Gentleman Highwayman*,[21] was published as late as 1794.

Little is known about Maclaine's early years. Most of the surviving biographical information is focused on his brother, Dr. Archibald Maclaine, a scholar of some note who was once preceptor to the prince of Orange and counted John Adams as one of his

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15 *A Letter To the Honourable House of Commons, Relating to The present Situation of Affairs. To which is added, An Address to all generous and humane Minds, occasioned by the Execution of Mr. James Maclaine, &c. Recommended to the serious Perusal of all those who have any Regard left for their Country. By Brittannicus, Esq.* (London: Sold by E. Withers, at Seven Stars, next the Inner-Temple-Gate in Fleet Street. 1750).

16 *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M.* (London: Printed for M. Thrush, at the King's-Arms, in Salisbury-Court, Fleet-Street, 1758-9).

17 "A Narrative of the apprehending, convicting and executing James Maclean, for a Highway Robbery" *TC68*, IV: 346-349.

18 "James Macleane, for the Highway, September, 1750" *STMR64*, II: 36-53.

19 Villette, John (et alii). "James Macleane, for a Robbery on the High-way, September, 1750" *VANM76*, III: 198-209.

20 James Montagu, "James Macleane, for a Robbery on the Highway, September, 1750." *MOBC88,* III: 58-81.

21 *Execution of Maclean, Commonly known by the Name of the Gentleman Highwayman* (Bath & London: Sold by S. Hazard [Printer to the cheap Repository for religious and moral Tracts] at Bath: By J. Marshall, at the cheap Repositories, No. 17, Queen-street, Cheapside, and No. 4, Aldermary Church-Yard; and R. White, Picadilly, London; and by all Booksellers, Newsmen, and Hawkers, in Town and Country, [1795?]).

parishioners during the latter's stay in the Hague in 1782.[22] Modern biographers rely heavily on the *Old Bailey Proceedings* of Maclaine's trial and the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* of his life, as reliable sources on his time in the capital are scarce. He was the youngest son of a Presbyterian preacher, and was born in Ireland in 1724. According to the Ordinary of Newgate, at his father's death (his older brother was studying in Glasgow at the time), Maclaine promptly squandered his inheritance[23] and took on work as a gentleman's footman and later as a butler.[24] Maclaine's own defense at the Old Bailey court places his arrival in the metropolis around 1743 ("About the beginning of the late French war"),[25] after which he successfully wooed an innkeeper's daughter with a fortune of £500. By 1745, the couple had set up a grocer's shop in Welbeck Street.[26] Although this version of events is repeated in several biographies (with some disagreement on the profession of his wife's father, which fluctuates between innkeeper and horse dealer), and was loosely confirmed by the Gentleman Highwayman himself at his trial,[27] I have been unable to source any evidence of the marriage in parish records.

According to his defense, Maclaine sold off his stock after his wife's death. The Ordinary of Newgate charges him with leaving his two daughters to the care of his mother-in-law in order to set himself up as a gentleman.[28] As his capital depleted, a penniless Maclaine turned to crime. He funded his gentleman's lifestyle, which enabled him to mingle with genteel society, and to pursue his ambition to make his fortune with an

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22 John Adams, "To Benjamin Franklin from John Adams, 20 February 1782" (*Founders Online*, *National Archives* [http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-36-02-0422]: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* [vol. 36], ed. Ellen R. Cohn. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 591–593.
23 *ONA* (OA17501003).
24 William Innes Addison, *A Roll of the Graduates of the University of Glasgow from 31st December, 1727 to 31st December, 1897 : with Short Biographical Notes* (Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1898), 393.
25 *OBP* (t17500912-22). Maclaine is most probably referring to the American phase of the War of the Austrian Succession, which opposed French and British forces between 1744 and 1748. His defence was also published in the *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer,* Sep. 18-20, 1750, *Read's Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer,* Sep. 22, 1750, and the *Remembrancer,* Sep. 22, 1750.
26 *ONA* (OA17501003).
27 *OBP* (t17500912-22).
28 *ONA* (OA17501003).

advantageous marriage, through highway robbery with his associate William Plunkett, a former journeyman apothecary. The pair went on to commit many robberies, most famously that of Horace Walpole in Hyde Park in November 1749.[29]

Maclaine was arrested the next summer for his involvement in a robbery committed on the Salisbury stagecoach in June 1750. He was taken following his attempt to sell some of the garments he stole from one of the passengers, who had already advertised their loss. The victim identified the belongings, and Maclaine, who had rather foolishly given his address to the shopkeeper tasked with selling his booty, was arrested outside his lodgings on the 27th of July.[30] News of his trial and imprisonment were avidly followed by the town, as the Gentleman Highwayman's celebrity soared.[31] Just like many other famous criminals, he became a lucrative exhibit in Newgate, and featured heavily in the London newspapers. He was found guilty and condemned to hang in spite of the support offered him by a number of respectable gentlemen who testified to his good character during the trial, and he was executed at Tyburn on the 3rd of October 1750.

Maclaine's short-lived celebrity stems from the scandalous revelation of his past as a footman and grocer, and his present as a member of polite society, a thief and a fortune-hunter. However, the Gentleman Highwayman does not attempt to pass amongst the London upper-class in order to enact some complex thieving schemes such as those described in the biographies of Jonathan Wild. Instead, the thief robs on the roads, and hunts for heiresses in London. The Maclaine narratives follow the highwayman's rise and fall, enabled by, as well as inscribed in, his costume and appearance. Maclaine's

29 Horace Walpole, "From JAMES MACLAINE, Friday 10 November 1749 OS." *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (Edited by W.S. Lewis. New Haven: Yale UP, 1937-1983), XL:63-65.

30 *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer,* Jul.26-28, 1750. The same report can also be found in the *General Advertiser,* Jul.28, 1750.

31 Both the *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer,* Jul. 31-Aug. 2, 1750, and *Old England*, Aug. 4, 1750, report on the number of ladies come to support Maclaine in prison, along with other "Persons of Distinction".

relationship with objects is thus closely tied to issues of status and belonging, as character becomes chattel and costume becomes self. His biographers follow a familiar plot, replete with extravagant fortune-hunting schemes, fatal masquerades, and final repentance. Whether professional, social, or national, Maclaine's acts of passing construct character and identity as portable possessions, which can be discarded, lost, stolen and assumed. The mutability of character constitutes a threat to gullible (and mostly female) factions of high society, who make easy prey for the fortune-hunter's scam. In this chapter, I explore the performativity inherent in the Gentleman Highwayman's attempt at social mobility. As Maclaine creates sartorial fictions in order to gain access to his desired rank, the mutability of the highwayman constructs his very identity as a portable object, which he struggles to control. Accounts of his life thus cast him in a series of easily-recognisable and socially-disruptive personas built upon literary stock-characters such as genteel rogue, fortune-hunter, or Stage Irishman, fictionalisations of the real-life criminal which fit him perfectly for one very particular genre, conduct literature.

VI.1 Clothing and profession

With the exception of texts dealing with the legal implications of Maclaine's thefts such as the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, the Gentleman Highwayman's relationship with objects as told by his eighteenth-century biographers is almost exclusively limited to items of clothing. Accounts of Maclaine's life focus on his progression from the role of gentleman of modest means to that of footman, then aspiring soldier, then grocer, then fortune hunter and finally criminal, a character evolution which proves irreversible. These transitions are marked sartorially throughout the narratives, as Maclaine is depicted adopting or abandoning meaningful clothing and accessories for each of his character changes. The final loss of his status as a gentleman is carried out in the *Complete History*

of James Maclean when, destitute, Maclaine relinquishes his sword for cash in a move which prevents him from accessing this rank thereafter: “as [the young Maclaine's] Credit, and even his fine Cloaths to the very last Shirt was gone, ... by the Sale of his Sword, the last Implement he could part with, he raised as much as bore his Charge on Foot”.[32] Maclaine then becomes a footman, an honest if lowly employment which he is said to despise, and even here he finally loses his place. This downward move signals him as a social exile, as any hope of getting assistance from his Irish family and acquaintances is made impossible by his former choices of employment.[33] Maclaine's abandonment of his sword signifies the loss of his rank, a loss which he will never be able to erase. His demise is sartorially marked too, as his criminal status is embodied in his shackles, which are jokingly construed as fashion accessories in the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean*: when he climbs into the cart that would carry him to Tyburn, “he would fain have been excused having the Hand-Cuffs put on, but Pat Henly said, Countryman, Indeed but I must put your Ruffles on; and so he did”.[34]

Maclaine's transitions of social status are hence marked by meaningful sartorial alterations. Although his final hours see him subjugated by his jailors through shackles, the figure of the Gentleman Highwayman is nonetheless depicted as able to exploit objects and their social meanings prior to his arrest. A master deceiver, the highwayman manipulates the defining potential of appearance in order to achieve social mobility. As highlighted by the Wild and Sheppard biographies, the most straightforward method to adopt a deceitful identity was through costume. Although decried as an unreliable marker of social status, dress and appearance remain powerful identifiers in the eighteenth century, as, according to Deidre Lynch, “discourse was embodied – at ease with its immersion in a print culture in which language necessarily assumes visible, corporeal form. At the same time, the body

32 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 8.
33 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 8-9
34 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 20.

was discursive, a telltale transcript of the identity it housed".[35] Carefully managing his appearance enables Maclaine to adopt multiple identities and effectively perform his desired social status through dress. The Maclaine biographies highlight the very unreliability of appearance, as well as the performativity of gentility.

Meaningful dress and accessories, in the Maclaine narratives, are thus not just tangible indicators of the ambitious highwayman's social movement. Sartorial usurpation also allows the criminal to adopt a number of professional identities, including that of aspiring gentleman and fortune-hunter. The highwayman's first experiments with deceitful clothing see him putting on a genteel character in order to lure single ladies of fortune: the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* comments that, following the death of his wife "he commenced Gentleman and Fortune-Hunter".[36] This now archaic use of the verb 'commence', which, according to the *OED*, could be used with a "complement, expressing vocation[or] status" as a synonym to 'set up as', clearly delineates both gentleman and fortune-hunter as actual professions, defined by fashionable items of clothing which are available for purchase by the former grocer.

According to the Maclaine biographies, a rich appearance is the defining feature of the aspiring fortune hunter. Maclaine's dress during his trial and imprisonment is described at length, and credited for his introduction to polite society. According to the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean*,

> Maclean ... appear'd in a very grand Manner; his Morning Dress being a Crimson Damask Banjan,[37] a Silk Shag Waistcoat, trim'd with Lace, black Velvet Breeches, white Silk Stockings, the same he wore in the Gatehouse; and his daily Dress some of the finest Suits of Velvet and Cloth, richly trim'd,

35 Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.

36 *ONA* (OA17501003).

37 According to the *OED*, a banyan refers to "a loose gown, jacket, or shirt of flannel, worn in India". Such a garment would serve the same purpose as a nightgown for fashionable eighteenth-century men, and would normally be worn at home as part of the morning dress. The second installment in Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* series, the *Levee*, features its hero Tom Rakewell wearing a banyan while receiving visitors in his new fashionable lodgings.

by which he gain'd Access among some inconsiderate Persons of Fortune.[38]

The criminal is thus very richly, if rather foppishly, dressed. In his discussion of eighteenth-century male effeminacy, Philip Carter identifies the wealth of delicate fabrics such as Maclaine sported as particular to the beau's dress, “rejecting the domestic woolens and linens deemed both materially and metaphorically coarse, [in favour of] of imported Belgian lace or French embroidery and velvet...").[39] However, this opulence cannot fool everyone, as the narrator of the *Genuine Account* confirms with the assertion that Maclaine “was always slighted by People of Sense and Discernment; who can always discover in the most dazling [sic] Dress, Assurance and Insolence from good Breeding”.[40] This sentiment is echoed in the *Complete History of James Maclean*, as Maclaine's attempt at genteel appearance is thwarted by his lack of taste: “he could not hit on any Means to introduce himself into any decent Company. He dress'd in tawdry Gaiety, with little Taste, and to as little Effect”.[41] Although a fashionable appearance will not alone attain the status of true gentleman, since natural taste and true gentility are required to complete the character, a rich costume is nonetheless sufficient for the fortune-hunter's purposes, as it provides access to less-discerning, and thus more easily swayed, young ladies.

The fortune-hunter must thus couple his natural good looks with a carefully crafted uniform and setting, as the highwayman's brand of fake gentility is altogether performative. In the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account,* a newly-single Maclaine,

> prepossessed with the Perfections of his Person, which he had the Vanity to think might induce some of the Compassionate and Merit-decerning [sic] Fair, to raise him from his present Obscurity, provided he could find Means to set off his personal Talent to proper Advantage by the Help of a genteel Dress, ... set all his Wits to work to raise the necessary Funds for supplying his

38 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 10.
39 Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 141. For further discussion of the nationalistic implications of different fabrics and materials, see Chloe Wigston Smith "'Callico Madams': Servants, Consumption, and the Calico Crisis." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 31:2 (2007), 29-55.
40 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 10.
41 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 7.

> Wardrobe.[42]

Here, confidence and 'genteel dress' are all that is required to enter into the profession. Hoping to dazzle a lady of fortune, the fortune-hunter completes his gentlemanly costume by staging it in a suitable habitat: the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean* shows Maclaine taking “an apartment in ... Soho, where he used to frequent the Coffee-Houses, appearing like a Gentleman, with Cloaths half-trimm'd”.[43] Although no longer an upscale part of town by the mid-eighteenth century, Soho was still ideally located in the fashionable 'Town district', home to most of the moneyed Londoners and their families during the season, and a perfect locale for an individual keen to fulfill his financial and social ambitions through marriage. It also hosted a wealth of places of pleasure and business, and thus afforded many opportunities for social mingling. According to Hannah Greig,

> this burgeoning West End, or 'town', enclave was the heartland of the season, accommodating its political infrastructure, including the court at St James's and parliament in Westminster, as well as its major social institutions: the theatre, opera, clubs, coffee houses, and concert venues. Characterized as the more leisured counterpoint to the older, mercantile 'city' in the east, it was specifically the 'town' rather than the capital as a whole that was said to accommodate the beau monde.[44]

Maclaine goes to extreme lengths to perfect his fortune-hunter performance. He carefully sets the scene and accessorises his costume with suitable props and backdrops, while situating himself in close proximity to both the polite districts and the corrupt world of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, home to theatre and prostitution. Although this show of

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42 *ONA* (OA17501003).

43 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 8. While richer than a plain suit, a half-trimmed suit was less costly than a full-trimmed suit: an advertisement for Margaret Moffat's tailoring business in the Strand listed a full-trimmed suit for £3 s18, and the same, half-trimmed, for £3 s12 (Margaret Moffat, *Margaret Moffat, at the Golden Key, in Lancaster-Court near the Strand, near St. Martin's Church* [London: , 1769?]), while John Cunningham advertises a plain suit for £4 s15, a half-trimmed suit for £5 s5, and a full-trimmed one for £5 s18 (John Cunningham, *John Cunningham, Taylor, at the Mahogany Door, near the Chapel, King's Street Golden Square. Name on the Door.* [London: , 1770?]); mid-century advertisements in the *Public Advertiser* also indicate a difference of roughly s6 between full and half trim, depending on the quality of the fabric.

44 Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

fashionable respectability and wealth is decried as easily uncovered by people of real taste, the highwayman's successful access to fashionable circles, coupled with the character given to him by “gentlemen of merit” during his trial points towards the inherent performativity of gentility.

Although Maclaine's purpose in donning the dress of a gentleman is mostly pecuniary, as he hopes to attract a wealthy wife, his sartorial ambition is not limited to his fortune-hunting endeavours. The highwayman's taste for upper-class garments is also displayed during his short marriage. According to the *Complete History of James Maclean*, while Maclaine was earning an honest living as a grocer, “in Parties of Pleasure ... and on Holidays, he effected the Dress of the Gentleman, especially when at a Distance from his Place of Abode, and by that Means created an Expense, that exceeded by much the Profits of his Trade”.[45] Maclaine's love of finery and upper-class entertainments, which had allegedly already caused him to squander his inheritance, also places a financial strain on his family during his stint as a merchant – his wife is credited for keeping their business afloat, and her death renews Maclaine's social ambitions.[46] His transitions from grocer to beau is itself signified materially, as the cosmetics of the fop come to replace the dust associated with his line of work: Maclaine “dresses out in lac'd Cloaths, and a Hat and Feather. ... [and transitions] from Brick-Dust and Whiting, to the powder'd Beau”.[47] Another example of sartorially-contrived, and ultimately unsuccessful,[48] gentility, the derided identity of the beau is parallel to that of the fortune-hunter, both characterised through their focus on clothing and appearance, and both falling short of true gentility.

Thievery and female support are not Maclaine's only source of income. According to his biographers, one of his favoured fundraising methods involves calling on potential

45 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 13.
46 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 9.
47 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 14.
48 See my previous discussion of the figure of the beau in Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* (110-112).

benefactors under pretence of engaging in a military career. The highwayman is described begging for money to fit him out for armed service, a profession itself designated through costume and a common professional outlet for impoverished young men, on several occasions. However, the money meant to purchase his uniform is invariably spent on a very different type of professional apparel, that of the fortune-hunter. The Ordinary of Newgate depicts a young Maclaine begging for "a Sum of Money to be employed in Purchase of a Pair of Colours; though if he really had succeeded in his impudent Request, he intended only to have equipped himself for a Fortune-hunting Campaign". Fortune-hunting and soldiering here share the same language, a simile which is further exploited later in the *Ordinary's Account*: "his Inclination to a Military Life evaporated, and he once more enlisted himself in the Service of the Fair".[49] Maclaine discards military apparel in favour of a costume more suited to the taste of frivolous women of fortune, and his rejection of military life communicates common anxieties over the feminisation of male civility in general, and of the armed forces in particular. According to Philip Carter,

> during the 1740s and 1750s, a period of particular alarm over rising levels of effeminacy, civic commentators paid especial attention to the impact of polite society on the armed forces. The image of the enfeebled soldier who preferred the comforts of civilian life to the rigours of war was a commonplace in both mid-century satires and sober social commentaries.[50]

Condemnation of the figure of the fortune-hunter in the Maclaine narratives is not limited to his social ambitions and performance of fake gentility. It participates also in a more general denunciation of corrupt male effeminacy, as the Gentleman Highwayman refuses honest employment in favour of fashionable appearance and criminal practices.

Fortune-hunting is not the only aspect of Maclaine's life which is closely associated with a military career. Instead, criminal behaviours are also couched in mock-heroic military language. Maclaine's illegal activities themselves are often mockingly compared

49 *ONA* (OA17501003).
50 Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society,* 130.

to military prowess, in a variation on the familiar story of the necessitous criminals condemned to hang for a petty crime while their more fortunate (and often corrupt) public office counterparts' abuses of power earns them wealth and honours. The much-ridiculed female narrator of the mock-heroic poem *A Petition to the Right Hon. Mr.— In Favour of Mr. Maclean* thus excuses Maclaine's theft and sings the praise of the highwayman in loosely structured heroic iambic couplets, depicting young ladies swooning over his delicacy in robbing them, and comparing his attacks to military feats: "'Twas Conquest and not Robbery!" The poem goes on to assert that "Brav'ry on Hounslow with a Gibbet pays,/ While look'd-on Sea-fights to new Honours raise".[51] Comparing the thieving arts to military bravery, and thus pointing out the unflattering similarity between acts of war and theft, while also mocking such justifications of criminal behaviour, the poem uses the mock-heroic tradition of both presenting and debunking the criminal as hero by measuring him against classical models. Although satirical in nature, this heroic treatment is used much more seriously in another text, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account.* It features Plunkett, Maclaine's accomplice, calling upon the natural rights of the brave to plunder in order to convince the fortune-hunter to turn highwayman in an immoral reversal of mock-heroic satire. Plunkett argues that

> A brave Man cannot want; he has a Right to live, and need not want the Conveniencies of Life, while the dull, plodding, busy Knaves carry Cash in their Pockets. We must draw upon them to supply our Wants, there need only Impudence, and getting the better of a few silly Scruples; there is scarce Courage necessary, all we have to deal with are such mere Poltroons.[52]

Playing perfectly on Maclaine's own sense of social superiority, Plunkett's justification firmly sets the highwayman as a squire figure, whose quality would

51 *A Petition to the Right Hon. Mr. – , In Favour of Mr. Maclean* (1750), 59 & 67-8. The petition was probably addressed to the then primer minister Henry Pelham (1696-1754), the "Right Hon. Mr.–", whom "Three Realms obey" (title page & 5), and contains a redundant and pretentious index, as well as an altogether ludicrous postscript in terrible French which participate in the satire directed at Maclaine's gullible female supporters.

52 *ONA* (OA17501003).

exempt him from more honest, yet less genteel, toils.

Maclaine's assertion of his superior status is not limited to his claim to a genteel birth and reputation. It extends to descriptions of Maclaine's criminal identity, as he strives to maintain his position within criminal hierarchies. Accused of robbing without his horse, as a mere footpad, in the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean*, "Maclean stiffly deny'd it, and insisted that he never robb'd on Foot in his Life".[53] Possession of the designating aspect of the highwayman's identity, the horse, allows Maclaine to set himself above more common rogues, and maintain his genteel aspirations even through his illegal practices. Although their victims and methods are very similar, highwaymen and footpads are set apart through their choice of accessories, the highwayman's horse conferring a certain gentility on his activities. Maclaine's insistence on distancing himself from the role of the uncouth footpad parallels his social aspirations, as he claims gentility even within criminal circles.

The highwayman's superior status is thus translated even into his illegal practices, which become courageous, indeed righteous, feats instead of violent crimes. Maclaine's treatment of his victims is also presented, in some biographies, as illustration of his gentlemanly nature. The *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean* describes "his genteel treatment of those who have unluckily been plundered by him on the Road, together with his gallant Behaviour to the Ladies".[54] The highwayman's good manners also feature in one of Horace Walpole's later essays for the periodical *The World*,[55] in which he explores the uniqueness of English politeness, exemplified in the

53 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 23.

54 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), iii. This so-called genteel treatment is cast into doubt by the evidence presented at his trial, as one of his victims, who had hoped to prevent Maclaine from stealing all of his valuables, is quoted as testifying that the highwayman "threaten'd to blow [his] brains out for concealing [them]." *OBP* (t17500912-22).

55 Horace Walpole, "Numb. 103, Thursday, Dec. 19, 1754." *The World. By Adam Fitz-Adam. Volume the Third* (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-mall, 1755), 286-96.

"extreme good breeding that has been introduced into the science of robbery"[56] and illustrated by Maclaine's own meeting with the author:

> An acquaintance of mine was robbed a few years ago, and very near shot through the head by the going off of a pistol of the accomplished Mr. McLean; yet the whole affair was conducted with the greatest good-breeding on both sides. The robber … no sooner returned to his lodgings, that he sent the gentleman two letters of excuses …. In the postscript, he appointed a meeting at Tyburn …, where the gentleman might *purchase again* any trifles he had lost; and my friend has been blamed for not accepting the rendez-vous, as it seemed liable to be construed by ill-natured people into a doubt of the *honour* of [the] man [original emphasis][57]

Satirical in tone, this passage plays on Maclaine's own pretensions to gentility. The highwayman is not only polite and honourable, but also accomplished, a worthy example of good breeding and education. The emphasis on "purchase again" and "honour" points to the absurdity of both the criminal's demands and his so-called gentility. Horace Walpole himself had been robbed and held at gun-point by Maclaine in Hyde Park in November 1749. The highwayman famously wrote to him,[58] demanding double the reward advertised in the newspapers[59] for the return of his belongings. Walpole refused through another advertisement[60], and Maclaine finally returned the booty under the original conditions. Walpole maintained an interest in the criminal, declining to visit him in prison but keeping up with the town gossip following his arrest. He wrote a short biography of the thief in a letter to Horace Mann,[61] in which he calls Maclaine a "fashionable highwayman".[62] In this letter, he rails at Maclaine's supposed courage, commenting instead that "his history is very particular, for he confesses every-thing, and is so little of a hero, that he cries and begs, and I believe if Lord Eglinton [whose weapon Maclaine stole] had been in any luck, might

56 Walpole "Numb. 103, Thursday, Dec. 19, 1754", 292-93.
57 Walpole "Numb. 103, Thursday, Dec. 19, 1754", 294-95.
58 Walpole, "From JAMES MACLAINE, Friday 10 November 1749 OS", XL:63-5.
59 *Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 10 & 11, 1749.
60 *Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 13, 1749.
61 Horace Mann (1706-1786), British diplomatic representative to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. He met Horace Walpole, to whom he was distantly related, in 1739. Their correspondence spans over forty years.
62 Walpole, "To MANN, Thursday 2 August 1750 OS", XX: 168-69.

have been robbed of his own blunderbuss."[63] Far from the brave and courteous hero featured in satirical and mock-heroic treatments of the criminal, the highwayman makes for a pitiful figure.

The prevalence of the fake hero and gentleman in the Maclaine narratives can be linked to Maclaine's popularity with London ladies, who were said to have visited him in large numbers during his incarceration, and to have then also provided for his financial needs. While criminal fame was common enough for the keepers of Newgate to profit from eager visitors, Maclaine is unusual in that, according to his eighteenth-century biographers, he received not only the attention, but also the support of reputable women. Engravings picturing the Gentleman Highwayman thus sport titles such as "Newgate's Lamentation or the ladys last farewell of Maclean" or "The ladies hero or the unfortunate James McLeane Esq."[64] (see figure IV). Thus, the similarities between Maclaine's circumstances and that of another famous, yet fictional highwayman, Macheath from the *Beggar's Opera*, does not escape eighteenth-century commentators eager to satirise both the criminal and his supporters. Horace Walpole is no exception, as he teases two of his females acquaintances by dubbing them after the two female heroines of the play: "the chief personages who have been to comfort and weep over this fallen hero, are Lady Caroline Petersham and Miss Ashe: I call them Polly and Lucy, and asked them if he did not sing 'Thus I stand like the Turk with his doxies around.'"[65] This verse line is taken from the *Beggar's Opera*'s last song, hard on the heels of the beggar's reluctant agreement to a

63 Walpole, "To MANN, Thursday 2 August 1750 OS", XX: 168.

64 *Newgate's Lamentation or the ladys last farewell of Maclean* [1750?] (Etching. British Museum Number: 1851,0308.411); and *The ladies hero or the unfortunate James McLeane Esq. Done from the original late in the possession of Mr Salt, Keeper of the Gate House. Publish'd according to Act of Par* ([London?]: Printed for T.Harrison, 1750; Engraving. British Museum Number: 1851,0308.408).

65 Walpole "To MANN, Thursday 2 August 1750 OS", XX: 169. Lady Caroline Petersham (1722-1784), wife of General William Stanhope, 2nd Earl of Harrington and Viscount Petersham. Hannah Greig describes her as a "high-profile fashionable hostess". Greig, *The Beau Monde*, 78. Elizabeth Ashe, also called the 'Pollard Ashe' or 'little Ashe' was an adventurer rumoured to be Princess Amelia's natural daughter. She was briefly married to gamester, traveller and criminal Edward Wortley Montagu, son of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. The quote is from the first line of the *Beggar's Opera*'s final song. (III:5).

Figure IV: James Maclaine, the Gentleman Highwayman



Figure IV.1: Newgate's Lamentation or the ladys last farewell of Maclean [1750?] (Etching. British Museum Number: 1851,0308.411)



Figure IV.2: The ladies hero or the unfortunate James McLeane Esq. Done from the original late[sic] in the possession of Mr Salt, Keeper of the Gate House. Publish'd according to Act of Par ([London?]: Printed for T.Harrison, 1750; Engraving. British Museum Number: 1851,0308.408).

happy ending and Macheath's choice of Polly as his wife. With Maclaine cast as the immoral highwayman,[66] and his female supporters as “doxies” (according to the OED “a beggar's trull or wench; ... a mistress, paramour, prostitute”), the Gentleman Highwayman's claim to gentility, courage and good breeding is thoroughly refuted. Moreover, the satirical invalidation of Maclaine's favoured identity as educated gentleman fallen upon bad times and influences is furthered through both legal and biographical processes, which construct his very character, and by extension, his identity, as a portable belonging which, while it can be forged, discarded or acquired at will, can also be altogether lost, with fatal consequences.

VI.2 Character and property

The Maclaine narratives stage the contest between the highwayman's social aspirations and his legally assigned identity as a common criminal. While the thief's (ultimately unsuccessful) claim to gentility is merely signified through his dress and appearance, his reputation itself becomes a concrete object, which he struggles to control through social and legal processes. In this section, I explore the different ways in which 'character' is constructed and imagined as a legal and ideological entity in Maclaine's biographies. In their exposition of the uses (and misuses) of the elements constructing identity, the Maclaine biographies treat one aspect of the criminal's identity, his character, as a particular type of chattel, which can be gained, lost or stolen like any other type of personal property. The word 'character' has had a wide range of meanings, from the scientific to the colloquial, the judicial, and the literary. Indeed, fictional characters

66 Indeed, Maclaine is sometimes listed, anachronistically, as the inspiration for Macheath in popular history resources (see for example David Brandon's *Stand and Deliver! A History of Highway Robbery*. Stroud: The History Press, 2001, 178).While Macheath is often thought to be modelled on the escapist John Sheppard, Pat Rogers recently argued against this, and proposed another possible model, the criminal Roger Johnson in *Documenting Eighteenth-Century Satire: Pope, Swift, Gay and Arbuthnot in Historical Context* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 193-228.

themselves remain an elusive concept even in literary criticism, or, in the words of John Frow in his 2014 study of the relationship between fictional characters and personhood, "an ontologically ambivalent construct".[67] However, one popular eighteenth-century definition, designating a character as "a testimonial, especially one given by a previous employer" (*OED*), has now become almost completely obsolete: the servant's character.

Usually in the form of a letter of recommendation, this form of character was of particular importance for experienced eighteenth-century servants looking for a new employer. According to Bridget Hill, "with a master refusing to give [the servant] a character another place might be difficult if not impossible to find".[68] An indispensable item for an unemployed servant, who had to present this written endorsement of his professionalism to any potential employer, a good character could be gained through professional performance, lost through misconduct, forged by an enterprising fraudster, or even obtained through blackmail. Such documents were thus often considered unreliable, prompting Sir John Fielding, in an observation added to his chapter on disputes between master and servants in the second edition of his *Extracts from ... the Penal Laws* (1762), to advocate for stronger, official regulations of this huge profession. He noted that "most of the Inconveniences arising in Families from the Misconduct of Servants are owing to the partial and unjust Characters given of them by their Masters or Mistresses, either from false good nature or undeserved resentment".[69] He continued to advise only to take a recommendation from the servant's last employer, ideally in person, as "written Characters are an Inlet to Imposition".[70]

67 John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014).

68 Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 49.

69 John Fielding, *Extracts from such of the Penal Laws, as particularly relate to the Peace and Good Order of this Metropolis: to which are added, the Felonies made so by Statute, Some General Cautions to Shop-keepers; and a short Treatise on the Office of Constable. By Sir John Fielding, One of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the Counties of Middlesex, Essex, and Surry, and for the City and Liberty of Westminster* (London : printed by H. Woodfall and W. Strahan, Law-Printers to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, for A. Millar, in the Strand, 1762), 141.

70 Fielding *Extracts from ... the Penal Laws* (1762), 141.

However, outright dismissal without a character remained a rather rare event, and indicated a very strained relationship between employer and employee. According to his biographers, Maclaine was nonetheless refused a character from each of his masters during his short stint as a domestic servant. The Ordinary of Newgate thus notes, in his account of the life of the highwayman, that “he lived some Years as Butler, but at last was guilty of some little Pilfering and Embezzlement in his Trust, and was dismissed from Service without a Character, which deprived him of all Hopes of Service in the Country”.[71] Maclaine's inability to secure a character from his former employers is commented upon in all of those biographies which mention his time as a servant. The lack of a written recommendation puts an abrupt end to his career in domestic service, and Maclaine is reduced to beg for his former master's assistance to leave Ireland and emigrate to the metropolis. The highwayman's overall reputation is moreover tarred by his failure to secure a character, as his assumed gentility (he was, after all, a member of the middling class by birth, and considered himself a gentleman) is said to suffer from his negative professional record. The Ordinary notes that, “as he had left [his first master]'s Service without a Character, it was more difficult for him now to get a Place without it, than if he had never been in Service before, as the Want of it laid him under a kind of Suspicion, which all his Pretensions to Gentility could not wipe off”.[72] Maclaine's loss of character, both tangible and figurative, confines him to a class lower than the one he was born to. Not only is his already suspicious claim to gentility now seen as utterly destroyed, but it also prevents him from gaining further employment. The very material loss of the character, a piece of property indispensable to the experienced servant, then forces him to bank on the anonymity provided by the metropolis to survive.

However, while it permitted Maclaine to engage in fortune-hunting and highway

71 *ONA* (OA17501003).
72 *ONA* (OA17501003).

robbery simultaneously, this very anonymity became a serious drawback once the criminal became involved with the judicial system. Much of the eighteenth-century legal process was coloured by the defendant's character, as defined by his neighbours and acquaintances. Peter King thus explains, while discussing which offences made it to the courts, that

> in most theft cases the victim's decision [to prosecute] was intimately tied up with the character, attitude, and previous behaviour of the accused. Strangers and vagrants were often more difficult to apprehend, but once captured they were more likely to be prosecuted ... If the accused was a local resident he was much less likely to be prosecuted if influential opinion within the community regarded him as a first offender with a previous good character.[73]

Young first time offenders were thus generally punished less severely, while rank, on the other hand, did not appear to play a huge role in character evidence. Rather, according to King, "the language of good character [focused] primarily ... on the individual's capacity to prove that they had lived in a neighbourly, honest, and orderly manner, supporting themselves by their own labour".[74] Although rarely sufficient to offset other types of convincing evidence such as eyewitness accounts, character evidence was often presented to the court in order to lessen the severity of the sentence or even obtain a pardon.[75] The characters of both prosecutor and accused could also be scrutinised, as malicious prosecution could result in a free pardon.[76] Moreover, according to Nicola Lacey,

> Character evidence was also central to the pre- and post-trial processes. ... The strong reliance of both formal and informal mechanisms of social control on networks of information about reputation ... helps to explain why the figures show distinctive patterns of criminalisation of the cities, where networks of communication and reputation were less robust, and hence a less potent resource for the criminal process …. The defendant who was unable to produce evidence rebutting an inference of bad character would be convicted.[77]

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73 Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 33.

74 King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, 309.

75 King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, 234. The importance of character and reputation in eighteenth-century trials is reiterated by many legal historians. See for example Nicola Lacey's study of female criminality and character in *Women, Crime, and Character. From Moll Flanders to Tess of the D'Ubervilles* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008),14.

76 For a thorough discussion of the elements influencing the final verdicts of eighteenth-century trials, see King's *Crime, Justice and Discretion*.

77 Lacey, *Women, Crime, and Character*, 16-17.

Unemployment and vagrancy could thus make it particularly difficult to provide a favourable character for the accused. A reputation as an honest and financially-independent neighbour was indispensable to sway a jury, and particularly important in London and other urban centres where population movements and more common anonymity made it difficult for criminals to obtain support from their own communities.

Although he was a stranger lacking any obvious means to support his lavish lifestyle, Maclaine nonetheless sought to build himself a strong character during his own trial, to garner the jury's sympathies. He called upon several of his respectable acquaintances as part of his convoluted and well-publicised defense,[78] which alleged that he had been embezzled by Plunkett, and that his prior confession to the judge was the result of a deranged mind. The *Old Bailey Proceedings* of his trial state that “he call'd nine gentlemen of credit, who gave him a very good character”.[79] However, this attempt proved unsuccessful. The prosecution had already demonstrated that Maclaine's character as a gentleman was a fraud, and the Gentleman Highwayman was a fortune hunter. Once lost, it seems, character cannot be regained. Although the *Ordinary's Account* relates that Maclaine attempted to prove his birth right to the rank of gentleman in front of the court, and states that his father had “bestowed an education upon [him] becoming his character, of which [he has] in [his] hand a certificate from a noble lord, four members of parliament, and several justices of peace for the county where [he] was born, and received [his]

78 He came to trial armed with a complete defense, which was reproduced in full in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* and summarised in many newspapers such as the *Country Journal or The Craftsman*, Sep. 15, 1750, the *London Evening Post*, Sep. 18-20, 1750, or the *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer*, Sep. 18-20, 1750. He had also planned to address the court after the jury's decision, but, following the guilty verdict, was too overcome to give the speech he had prepared. It was however published, and can be found in the “September 1750” number of Hill's *British Magazine*, 362-3, the *London Evening Post*, Sep. 18, 1750, the *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer*, Sep. 18-20, 1750, the *Penny London Post or The Morning Advertiser*, Sep. 19-21, 1750, *Old England*, Sep. 22, 1750, *Read's Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, Sep. 22, 1750, the *Remembrancer*, Sep. 22, 1750, the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 25-6, and *ONA* (OA17501003).

79 *OBP* (t17500912-22).

education",[80] Maclaine lost all rights to claim that character through evidence of his criminal activities.

Once his crimes have been uncovered, Maclaine's character is irredeemably lost in spite of his attempt to regain respectability through both written and oral evidence during his trial. Both this loss, which denies him any hope of a pardon or a lenient sentence, as well as his attempt to regain control over his reputation within a court of law, are mentioned in the biographies published after his execution. In the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean*, the highwayman is described as disappointed in his plans to marry a wealthy young lady by an officer aware of his disreputable past. The captain

> very justly acquainted [the young lady and her family] with Mac's Character and Design. ... [Maclaine] insisted on Satisfaction in fighting [the captain]; but the Captain refused, answering very properly that he was not obliged to fight every Scoundrel, and that he was no Gentleman …. Maclean ... wrote directly to [an acquaintance in] Ireland ... to write to him to testify his being born a Gentleman ... but the Captain knowing his Character, and believing it not to be genuine, refused him.[81]

In this probably fabricated episode,[82] Maclaine is depicted as going to great lengths in order to prove, and hence control, his reputation. By obtaining a written confirmation of his rank, a move highly reminiscent of the character reference given to servants by former employers, the highwayman sought to counter his public infamy. However, having once lost his character, and hence his rank, Maclaine is altogether unable to regain his social status.

A good character is thus necessary for more than legal and professional interactions. In Maclaine's biographies, it becomes an indispensable aspect of both identity and

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80 *ONA* (OA17501003).

81 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 15-16.

82 While many biographies depict Maclaine's unsuccessful attempts to woo heiresses, who narrowly avoid marrying the fortune hunter thanks to a timely discovery of his real identity, Maclaine's quarrel with the captain features only in the *Genuine Account*, making its veracity at least debatable. A similar incident was however reported by Horace Walpole in a letter to Horace Mann, XX: 168-169.

gentility. So the imprisoned highwayman laments, in Dr. Allen's account of his final days: "What is Life to me, with my good Name and Character gone?"[83] However, character takes on an increasingly material status in biographies of Maclaine as it does in eighteenth-century fiction in general. In so doing, it also adopts some of the more worrying properties of meaningful objects, which, in the rise of a consumer society, had become more widely available, and possession of which was no longer limited to one social group.

In her discussion of character in eighteenth-century fiction, Deidre Lynch highlights the link between characters and property:

> The self-congratulatory references, which become a feature of literary culture at the start of the eighteenth century, to the prodigal, fertile inventiveness that British authors evince in their character drawing go hand in hand with depictions of England as a nation of shopkeepers, a land where domestic goods, bric-a-brac, collectibles, and plain old stuff, abound …. Characters in England … have property-like properties. They are objects of merchandising, of commodity tie-ins and spin-offs.[84]

In the Maclaine biographies, character is not just a physical reference, but also a form of façade, to be manipulated and misused by dishonest and ambitious individuals, indeed imagined as an item of clothing to be donned and doffed at will; Maclaine is thus described as having "put on the fine Gentleman" in the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean*.[85] *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open,* one of the satirical pamphlets published following Maclaine's trial, contained a statement of intent for a society of Irish fortune hunters eager to service London's single ladies and widows, which proposed to "examine the Abilities of every Man before he is registered a Member [of the Honourable Society of Hibernians], and [ensure that] he has Sufficiency to maintain our long established Character".[86] This character, which consists of handsome appearance and social ambition, is here explicitly constructed in order to con wealthy and naive ladies into

83 Allen, *An Account of the Behaviour of Mr. James Maclaine* (1750), 9.
84 Lynch, *The Economy of Character,* 18.
85 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 6.
86 *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open* (1750), 6. This particular text is examined in more details in the following section.

objectionable unions, and considered a specifically Irish trait. While Maclaine himself is unable to keep control of his own character, his *modus operandi* suggests the existence of more talented fortune hunters, able to not only control, but also manipulate their character, putting all London ladies at risk.

However, genuine character is difficult to disguise, as exemplified by the satirical nature of *M-c L-n's Cabinet*, a work more concerned with mocking the figure of the Irish fortune-hunter and his credulous victims than uncovering any real danger to genteel society. Rather, the true nature of the deceiver must be apparent to anyone acquainted with legitimate gentility. The Ordinary of Newgate thus comments on Maclaine's attempts:

> but though he has been called the Gentleman Highwayman, and in his Dress and Equipage very much affected the fine Gentleman, yet to a Man acquainted with good Breeding, that can distinguish it from Impudence and Affectation, there was very little in his Address or Behaviour, that could entitle him to that Character.[87]

The highwayman's skill at assuming the character of a gentleman of fortune can only fool individuals unacquainted with true good breeding, a common reproach in those biographies quick to highlight that the highwayman was first introduced into London good society by notorious kept women. A social upstart, Maclaine lacks the ability to portray the gentleman convincingly, and ultimately fails to keep hold of this character. The Gentleman Highwayman is nonetheless at bottom no more than a petty criminal.

VI.3 The fortune-hunter: Maclaine as fictional character

However, it is as literary character that the Gentleman Highwayman reaches his full potential. Here, the real-life criminal becomes a stock-character, shorthand for fake gentility and fortune-hunting. He thus appears briefly in the 1759 satirical biography of the famous courtesan Fanny Murray, the *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M*, in the

87 *ONA* (OA17501003).

familiar plot device whereby both courtesan and fortune-hunter court each other with views on the other's imaginary riches.[88] As treatments of Maclaine becomes more and more informed by fictional devices as well as biographical texts, the figure of the real-life criminal is supplanted by the character of the Gentleman Highwayman, and he comes to embody not only the role of the fortune-hunter, but also that of the Stage Irishman.

In addition to his refined appearance and social ambition, one particular aspect of Maclaine's identity is constructed as predisposing him to fortune-hunting: his ethnicity invites consideration within the stereotype of the Irish fortune-hunter, an impoverished yet socially-ambitious gentleman of dubious origins, preying on naive young ladies easily swayed by good looks and assumed gentility. One anonymous satirist produces an entire pamphlet based on this very trope, *M—c L—n's Cabinet broke open*.

M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open; or, His private List of all the Duchess Dowagers, Countesses, Widow Ladies, Maiden Ladies, Widows and Misses of Honour, Virtue, and Large Fortunes in England: Together With their several Places of Abodes features an extensive list of all the single women of fortune in London, ranked from Duchesses to Misses, and claims to have been taken from the Gentleman Highwayman's private papers. Breach of privacy is implied in the title, as the cabinet is an especially personal item of furniture or space. The single ladies are objects of interest, to be displayed to a knowing audience. The 'cabinet' genre, a textual equivalent of the 'cabinet of curiosities', collects short, unusual exemplary or exceptional pieces of writing around a common theme. While often reserved to formal, often numismatic collections, the contents of a 'cabinet' can range from religious tracts, historical documents, to witticisms, verse, letters, and literary extracts.[89] These publications, unlike that of miscellanies, aim to display, and not just

88 *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M.* (1758-9), II:78-83.

89 See for example Thomas Elridge's *Book of Rarities: or, Cabinet of Curiosities unlock'd, by the Key of Experience*, which promises “near a Hundred useful and diverting Amusements”, including the “Use of Optick Instruments”, “to keep Kidney Beans green all the Year” and “Invisible Writing” (London: Printed and sold by the Author, 1743), title page.

collect, extraordinary materials. Inscribed within the tradition of a (satirical) cabinet, the ladies listed in *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open* effectively become chattels, prized possessions to be contained and artfully displayed, indicative of their owners' taste and erudition, or, in the case of Maclaine, lack thereof.

The text opens with a statement from the Hibernian society of fortune-hunters, followed by its list of single and wealthy London ladies. The society intends not only to organise the profession, but also to regulate the flux of aspiring members, in order to always "have a fresh supply of able bodied Men, with large Dimensions, for the use of those Widows and Maiden Ladies of very great Fortunes".[90] Both hunter and hunted are here objectified, as the tongue-in-cheek "large dimensions" of the Irishmen counterbalance the "great fortune" of the single ladies. Fortune-hunters are construed as a commercial product, wholly dependent on the demand of the London ladies, and participating in a normalised, yet sexually-charged, transaction.

While ideally suited to the circumstances of the 'Gentleman Highwayman', the contents of this pamphlet are hardly new. Indeed, it is modeled upon a previous list, the *Irish Register,*[91] published on the occasion of the wedding of Lady Isabella Montagu, Dowager Duchess of Manchester, to Edward Hussey, of Irish descent, and who was to become the first and last Earl of Beaulieu. Described as "one of the most impudent things that ever was printed" by Horace Walpole in a letter to Horace Mann dated May 26th, 1742,[92] the *Irish Register* is soon followed by an *English Register.*[93] This English iteration

90 *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open* (1750), 7.

91 *The Irish Register: or a List of the Duchess Dowagers, Countesses, Widow Ladies, Maiden Ladies, Widows and Misses of large Fortunes in England, As register'd by the Dublin Society, for the Use of their Members. Together with the Places of their Several Abodes. Also the Charge given by their President at their last General Assembly* (London: for T.Cooper at the Globe in Pater-Noster-Row, 1742).

92 Horace Walpole, "To MANN, Wednesday 26 May 1742 OS", XVII: 438-439.

93 *The English Register: or, the Irish Register Match'd. Containing a List of such of the Unmarried Nobility,Gentry, Merchants, &c. As ought in Honour and Justice to prevent the English Ladies from going Astray. To which is prefix'd, An Epistle from a Society of Young Ladies* (London: Printed for T.Cooper, at the Globe in Pater-Noster-Row, 1742).

lists affluent London bachelors, including Walpole himself as well as Alexander Pope, and shames them for their apathy towards the plight of unwed ladies whom they leave to the mercy of Irish fortune-hunters. *A Master-key to the Rich Ladies Treasury, or the Widower and Batchelor Directo*ry[94] finally orders the first list alphabetically, and included information on each ladies' reputed fortune, including that bound in stock. Such scandalous registries also exist outside of satire on fortune-hunting, and are more particularly linked with the world of London prostitutes and pimps. One such catalogue, the notorious *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies, or, Man of Pleasure's Kalendar*,[95] is published yearly during the second half of the eighteenth century, and contained the prostitutes' names, addresses and descriptions of both their appearance and particular skills. Drawing on a well established, and potentially immoral genre, both the fortune-hunters and ladies are exposed in *M—c L—n's Cabinet broke open*, construed as curious objects to gawk and wonder at.

The mocking concept of an organised society of Irish fortune-hunters was also not new, appearing for example in *Ramble Through London: Containing Observations on Men and Things*, which was published in 1738,[96] as well as the 1725 *View of London and*

94 *A Master-Key to the Rich Ladies Treasury, or the Widower and Batchelor Directory. Containing an exact Alphabetical List of Duchess, Marchioness, Countess, Viscountess, Baroness Dowagers, Ladies by Curtesie, Daughters of Peers, Baronet Widows, Widows, and Spinsters in Great Britain. With an Account of their Places of Abode, reported Fortunes, and Fortune they possess in the Stocks. By a Younger Brother* (London: Printed for J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1742).

95 *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies: Or Man of Pleasure's Kalendar, For the Year 1773. Containing an Exact Description of the Most Celebrated Ladies of Pleasure...* (London [1756-1795]). While it is possible that the lists were factual or fabricated, according to Elizabeth Campbell Delinger, “it is at least clear that Harris was generally believed to exist in the 1750s and that women were believed to pay him for their listings.” “The Garment and the Man: Masculine Desire in 'Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies' 1764-1793.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11:3 (July 2002), 370. See *A Catalogue of Jilts, Cracks, Prostitutes, Night-walkers, Whores, She-friends, Kind Women, and others of the Linen-lifting Tribe who are to be seen every Night in the Cloysters in Smithfield, from the hours of Eight to Eleven, during the Time of the Fair* (London: Printed for R. W. near Smithfield, 1691) for an earlier example of such a list.

96 *A Ramble Through London: Containing Observations in Men and Things. By a True-Born Englishman.* (London: Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford-Arms, in Warwick-Lane; Edward Withers, at the Seven Stars against the End of Chancery-Lane, in Fleetstreet; J. Jolliffe, at the Bible in St. James's-Street: and Sold by the rest of the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1738), 15-22.

Westminster: or, the Town Spy.[97] For the most part, the preface of the *Cabinet* follows that of the *Irish Register,* apart from a couple of additions and alterations to better fit Maclaine's circumstances. The list, on the other hand, is significantly different, and appears to have been updated. These texts construct the fortune-hunter as a commodity, providing an indispensable service; indeed, the fictional society even has a system in place for ladies to discreetly get their name included in future iterations of the list. The new members must thus be "immediately imported … for the Use of those Widows and Maiden Ladies… that now lie unoccupied and neglected". Irishmen are described as possessing natural talents, such as "genteel Address, and modest Assurance, peculiar to them" suiting them particularly for wooing British ladies, whose willingness to marry foreigners is also commented upon.[98] The ladies are of course also constructed as objects, and the society itself is "for incorporating and manufacturing of British Commodities".[99]

Through this list, the figure of Maclaine is embedded within a well-established literary tradition, that of the Stage Irishman. Maclaine himself fits effortlessly into this trope, centred around a bullish, impudent Irish stock character whose national pride and touchy honour function as a comic fixture not only on the English stage, but also in print by the mid eighteenth-century.[100] As a former footman, butler, grocer, aspiring gentleman, and finally London highwayman, Maclaine took on each of the stereotypical professions usually assigned to eighteenth-century Irish characters (although he did not enter the army, he allegedly raised money on the pretence of purchasing a military post on multiple occasions).[101] Indulging in violent outbursts on matters of honour worthy of Lucius

97 *A View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy* (1725), 15-20.
98 *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open* (1750), 7, 8, & 10.
99 *The Irish Register* (1742), 52, & *M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open* (1750), 42.
100 See for instance Captain Fitzpatrick in *Tom Jones* (1749), or Ulick MacKilligut and ONeale in *Humphry Clinker* (1771). For more on representations of Irishness in eighteenth-century literature, see Joep Leerssen's *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael : Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork UP, 1996 [1986]).
101 *ONA* (OA17501003).

O'Trigger, the Stage Irishman of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*,[102] and adopting military courting metaphors reminiscent of those used by Callaghan O'Brallaghan, Macklin's good-intentioned Irish suitor,[103] the Gentleman Highwayman follows the Stage Irishman script closely in the Maclaine narratives. Irish figures, including that of the fortune-hunter, are not only inveterate pursuers of women; they are also often feminised. Thus John Breval's 1717 poem *Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune Hunter*, exploits all the stereotypes common to the Stage Irishman from his love of finery and gambling to his dishonesty and false bravado,[104] and reverses the classic tale of the young girl snatched by a madam as she first sets foot in London, although in a much more straightforward manner:

> Hail lovely Irishman, if right I guess,
> Thy features, Air, and Shape, that Land confess;
> …
> My name is Wyburn, from all Parts repair,
> To my fam'd roof the discontented Fair;
> …
> There, if thou answer'st Expectations well,
> (As by some sure Prognosticks I foretel)
> The Pow'rs of Love with Fortune shall combine,
> To make a rich young Widow's Jointure thine.[105]

Mac-Dermot thus becomes a kept man, an 'Irish beau', revelling in the metropolis' entertainments. His change of circumstances is expressed sartorially throughout the poem, as the young Irish farmer curses his “Brogues … / And these coarse Trowzers but a vile Disguise”, and swaps them for a “pompous Liv'ry” on his first opportunity.[106] The love of finery, the first step towards fortune-hunting, is shared by Maclaine, whose extravagance,

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102 Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals. A Comedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden* (London: Printed for John Wilkie, No. 71, St.Paul's Church-Yard, 1775).

103 Charles Macklin, *Love à la Mode* (London: Printed in the Year MDCCLXXIX, 1779). This comedy debuted in Covent Garden in 1759.

104 *Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune-Hunter. A Poem. In Six Canto's. By the Author of the Art of Dress.* (London: Printed for E. Curll, in Fleetstreet, 1719 [1717]). The reference to the *Art of Dress* identifies John Breval as the author, an attribution which is confirmed by Edmund Curll's own advertisements. See for example the list of “Books Printed for E.Curll at Pope's-Head, in Rose-Street, Covent-Garden”, published in 1720, which lists the author of the poem, sold for s1, as “Captain Breval”, 9.

105 *Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune-Hunter* (1719 [1717]), III: l.53-76.

106 *Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune-Hunter* (1719 [1717]), I: l.33-4; 70.

Erin Mackie remarks in her study of the nineteenth-century iterations of another fictionalised and genteel highwayman, Dick Turpin, is “highly urban, almost effeminate”.[107]

However, the Irish fortune-hunter is not simply an Hibernian variation on the English fop. As the Gentleman Highwayman adopts costumes and props in order to create deceitful identities, circulating within close proximity of the morally dubious worlds of hack-writers, prostitutes and theatre, his trajectory mirrors that of the familiar theatrical trope of the Stage Irishman. According to Helen Burke in her 2011 paper “'Integrated as Outsiders': Teague’s Blanket and the Irish Immigrant 'Problem' in Early Modern Britain”, the stereotypical 'teague' character came to be defined by a particular attire, the blanket, or mantle, and the brogues, a term originally referring to a type of rustic leather shoes, but also applied to strong Irish accents.[108] While originally a bumbling, lower-class character, the comedic Stage Irishman started to refer to other forms of class identity, including petty officers, impoverished gentry, and lower middle-class fortune-hunters. Sartorial dismissal of such socially ambitious characters is prevalent in satire. Helen Burke highlights the role of inappropriate dress in caricatures of Irish immigrants. The Irishman

> goes to display himself in all his finery at the Royal Exchange … implicitly [identifying himself] as a player—socially, romantically, and economically—in the new commercial society that was emerging in England in the late seventeenth century [his] claim to be part of that meritocratic order, however, is punctured by the revelation that he has a hole in his stocking that he imagines he is hiding.... At the level of intellect and appearance, this disclosure suggests, the Irishman is lacking. Like Teague’s tattered blanket, this holey stocking suggests that he belongs at the lower, ragged end of English society.[109]

Confined, through his nationality, to the lowest social status, the Irishman's, and, by extension, Maclaine's, attempt to pass within the capital's polite genteel circles is

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107 Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 104.
108 Helen Burke, “'Integrated as Outsiders': Teague’s Blanket and the Irish Immigrant 'Problem' in Early Modern Britain” *Éire-Ireland* 46: 1&2 (Earrach/Samhradh / Spring/Summer 2011), 20.
109 Burke, “'Integrated as Outsiders'”, 40-41.

sartorially doomed, their superficial costuming designating them as outsiders and social upstarts.

While pursuing heiresses was hardly an Irish-only sport, the figure of the Irish fortune-hunter is unusual in its association of criminality with the type. Thus another Stage Irishman, Roebuck, an impoverished “Irish Gentleman, of a wild roving temper” in search of a wealthy wife, opens George Farquhar's 1699 *Love and a Bottle* by exclaiming “If I have one Penny to buy a Halter withal in my present necessity, may I be hang'd; tho I'm reduc'd to a fair way of obtaining one methodically very soon, if Robbery or Theft will purchase the Gallows”. The Irish gentleman then greets a (narrowly avoided) quarrel with delight, as fate has sent him “a Throat to cut, and consequently a Purse”.[110] More than ready, like Maclaine, to turn to violent crime not only to alleviate his poverty, but also to fund a rakish lifestyle, Roebuck dismisses the threat of Tyburn as a minor byproduct of his proposed course of action. While it is difficult to assess eighteenth-century crime rates, the alleged Irish predisposition towards crime was an enduring stereotype.[111] Both the life of Maclaine and that of *Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune-Hunter* are framed by criminal acts. Mac-Dermot steals from his master in order to ship himself to London. Maclaine is dismissed from his place as a butler without a reference as he “was guilty of some little Pilfering and Embezzlement”.[112] When he thinks his mistress has died, Mac-Dermot snatches her jewelry before disappearing from the metropolis.[113] Maclaine funds his gentlemanly lifestyle through highway robbery. Fortune-hunting as well as service, both professions extremely common for eighteenth-century fictional Irishmen, are hence criminally tainted in these two texts, and come together in the figure of the Stage Irishman.

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110 George Farquhar, *Love and a Bottle. A Comedy, As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane By His Majesty's Servants. Written by Mr. George Farquhar* (London: Printed for Richard Standfast, next door to the Three-Tun Tavern, near Temple-Bar; and Francis Coggen, in the Inner-Temple-lane, 1699), Drammatis Personae, 1, & 7.

111 Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative*, 24.

112 *ONA* (OA17501003).

113 *Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune-Hunter* (1719 [1717]), VI: l.95-110.

According to Christopher Morash, while the influx of Irish playwrights and actors such as George Farquhar, Robert Wilks or Thomas Sheridan in eighteenth-century London served to complicate the trope by presenting counter, positive Stage Irishmen such as Captain O'Blunder in Sheridan's *Brave Irishman* (1743) or, to an extent, Roebuck in *Love and a Bottle*, the Stage Irishman generally remained a negative stereotype, serving to reinforce English normativity and crystallising Anglo-Irish issues.[114]

The association between Maclaine's ethnicity and his chosen criminal profession is not confined to satire, as the narrator of the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean* also exclaims against Irish fortune-hunters:

> Maclean, notwithstanding his rich Dresses, his going in Chairs, and the Number of Ladies who continually came to visit him, was nevertheless suspected by the Neighbours to live by fraudulent Practices, he belonging to a Gang of Irish Rapperees, Gamesters, Fortune-Hunters, or Brothers in Iniquity, which infest the Court-End of the Town, and ought to be made to give some Account of themselves how they live, as they appear in much the same manner as he did; and tho' he has declared no Body robb'd with him but Plunkett,[115] yet it is shrewdly suspected some of them follow the same Trade.[116]

Through his Irishness, Maclaine is constructed as belonging to a new set of criminals, who, although their activities are not downright illegal, break both social and moral customs. A national propensity for crime is captured in the term 'Rapparee', which, according to the OED, while it could refer to “any irregular soldier; a bandit, a rogue”, more specifically designated “an Irish pikeman or irregular soldier,… hence: an Irish bandit, robber, or freebooter.”[117]

The Gentleman Highwayman's own identity is therefore more closely related to his

114 Christopher Morash, “Theatre in Ireland, 1690–1800: from the Williamite wars to the Act of Union.” (Margaret Kelleher & Philip O'Leary (eds) *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 378.

115 Although Plunkett himself sports a very Irish name, he is never formally acknowledged as such in the Maclaine biographies or the London newspapers.

116 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 14.

117 This epithet is particularly potent politically, as it was also used to refer to Jacobite Irish soldiers during the Williamite War of 1689-1691. For more on the highwayman as a Jacobite figure, see Erin Mackie's *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates : The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (2009), 71-113.

fortune-hunting activities than his actual criminal record. Where other criminal biographies are centred around their subjects' elaborate (and often fictional) or sensational thieving schemes, accounts of Maclaine's life all but ignore his criminal activities, detailing instead his fortune-hunting endeavours and social mobility. Dror Wahrman has highlighted the profusion of opportunities afforded by eighteenth-century London, "to pass oneself off as something or someone that one was not,[as] the consumer revolution, with its baffling array of goods, provided the means, [made] all markers of distinction available to anybody for a price."[118] This environment not only makes Maclaine's attempt to infiltrate London's polite circles easier, but also fuels anxieties surrounding socially ambitious young men, eager to court their way into wealth. It is thus Maclaine's fortune-hunting, and not his thefts, which captivates his biographers.

VI.4 Epistolary narratives

This interest is particularly apparent in the *Complete History of James Maclean*, which fills in the gaps in its narrative by describing Maclaine and Plunkett's elaborate fortune-hunting schemes through a series of letters, an epistolary narrative complete with ruined young ladies, bribed chambermaids, fortune-hunters' tricks exposed (including an extreme reliance on rich clothing to gain access to young heiresses), and hunting metaphors designating single women as poultry and venison. The Maclaine narratives feature an exceptional amount of correspondence, both real (or presented as such) and clearly fictional. He is mentioned on several occasions in Horace Walpole's correspondence following their encounter in Hyde Park in November 1749, during which Maclaine stole his watch and sword, and which occasioned a short exchange between the writer and the highwayman via a hand-delivered letter[119] and advertisements in

118 Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), 203.
119 Walpole, "From JAMES MACLAINE, Friday 10 November 1749 OS", XL:63-65.

newspapers.[120] In addition to descriptions and, at times, quotations of this already unusual exchange,[121] several biographies also sport letters allegedly written by Maclaine's brother to Dr. Allen, the minister who assisted Maclaine during his last days, and to the Gentleman-Highwayman himself.[122] As Maclaine trespasses into social circles in which he does not belong, he seeks to invade the intimate space of the home through marriage, stealing young ladies' fortune and prospects through social and sartorial deceit. Epistolary narratives, affording insights into its protagonist's most private communications, thus function to expose both the fortune-hunter's cunning and his would-be victim's disastrous fate.

However, it is the *Complete History of James Maclean* which exploits the conventions of epistolary narratives to the greatest extent, both to contain the Gentleman Highwayman, and to preach proper conduct to young ladies. Where other biographies are satisfied with Archibald Maclaine's alleged correspondence, the *Complete History* features two short, and clearly fictional, epistolary narratives. While the first focuses on the anguish of a young lady undone by the fortune hunter, the second delves into Maclaine's relationship with his associate, Plunkett, and follows the pair's unsuccessful fortune-hunting endeavours.[123] These letters portray an often tense friendship between 'Jemmy' and 'Billy', their money-making schemes and near-constant need for cash, as well as their complete disregard for the women ruined by the fortune-hunter. Plunkett himself adopts a

120 *Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 10, 11 & 13, 1749.

121 Manuscript material by eighteenth-century criminals hanged for highway robbery, pickpocketing or housebreaking rarely survives.

122 Allen, *An Account of the Behaviour of Mr. James Maclaine* (1750), 20-5 & 30-2. The second edition, also published in 1750, features a new letter from the highwayman to an unnamed friend, 33-6. An additional letter predating Maclaine's trial, is also included in the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 31-33. This letter was reproduced in *VANM76*, III: 208-9, *STMR64*, II: 50-1, and the *Execution of Maclean, Commonly known by the Name of the Gentleman Highwayman* [1795?], 11-3. While the recipient remains unidentified in the *Genuine Account*, and is only referred to as 'a friend' in the *Annals of Newgate* and *Select Trials*, the *Execution of Maclean* names Dr. Allen as Archibald Maclaine's correspondent. While the content of these letters is consistent from one text to the other, there is no clear evidence as to their authenticity.

123 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 21-5 & 27-51.

multifaceted role as servant, friend and manager, caring for Maclaine's wardrobe, mingling with his Irish relations, seeking new fortune-hunting opportunities, and keeping jilted lovers and creditors at bay. While Maclaine seeks easy money in the masquerades of the Hague during a visit to his brother, Plunkett deals with their London affairs, disastrously invests his share of their booty in a troublesome mare, pawns his belongings, leaves on a visit to Ireland, and becomes altogether penniless, ultimately depending on Maclaine's generosity to make his way back home. Providing both comic relief and insight into the wretched life of the perpetually cash-strapped criminal, Plunkett functions as the fortune-hunter's squire and confidant, enabling and prompting the Gentleman Highwayman to crime and social ambition, and exposing the technicalities of fortune-hunting in the process.

Plunkett's main service lies in seeking fortune-hunting opportunities for his friend and associate; in doing so, he is characterised, along with the young lady, as hunting dog and prey respectively. Wary of detection, the pair correspond in code, in which rich young ladies are turned to does and Maclaine becomes a literal hunter, with Plunkett at his side as his faithful hound. The former apothecary writes:

> having my Nose quite sharp set, I picked up a Trail which I pursued four Miles below ---, where I espyed a Doe of forty Thousand, enclosed in a Park, with an old stern Fellow at the Gate; yet there were some Breaches in the Wall, whereby I thought it practicable to steal in, and catch the Fawn napping.[124]

This hunting metaphor is decoded in later letters, considered safe from prying eyes. The doe is “a young Lady of 40,000l. independent, in some small Measure despicable in Person, desirous of being married”; the fellow at the gate, “a rustic old Father of great Fortune”, who confines his daughter at home, where “there is no Gentleman of Fortune or Spirit enough to Court the Girl”; while the breaches at the wall refer to the young lady's desire to be “married to a handsome, tall Gentleman … [who would] bring her to her

124 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 28.

beloved London."[125] This passage establishes the roles of each participants along with the perfect circumstances for a fortune-hunting venture: a foolish and secluded young lady, a strict guardian reluctant to engage in fashionable circles and entertainments, a well-informed and dedicated servant, and, most importantly, a dashing and unscrupulous fortune-hunter. Posing as a gentleman of fortune and parading in his best apparel as the family attends Sunday service, Maclaine attempts to gain access to the young lady by, fittingly, requesting access to her father's hunting ground: "[he] borrowed a Gun of the Landlord of the Inn, and sent [Plunkett] with an impudent, formal Compliment to the Lord of the Manuor [sic], ..., desiring leave to shoot in his Enclosures".[126] With this parallel between fortune-hunting and sport, the Gentleman Highwayman engages in social poaching, entering hunting grounds to which he has no right from his birth or social status, in a transaction strictly between the hunter and the legal owner of his quarry. The thief's predatory behaviour is thus no longer exclusively limited to chattels, the inner workings of his practices exposed in order, it is claimed, to warn young ladies and their fortunes about their danger.

However, Plunkett's involvement in the pair's fortune-hunting schemes is not limited to seeking lucrative opportunities for Maclaine. He is also depicted as engaging in some fortune-hunting of his own, in which the hunter himself becomes the prey. He asks Maclaine to bring back some lace from the Hague, which he plans to sell to ladies under the pretense that he "had been in Holland and France, with [his] Lord; and after puffing a little, perhaps have Sharp's good Fortune, by being brib'd by the Ladies to assist them in seducing [his] Master".[127] Now, the Gentleman Highwayman is being hunted by ladies ready to pay to swell the ranks of his conquests, with Plunkett as the emissary. Maintaining his persona as Maclaine's servant, the accomplice treats both ladies and the fortune-hunter

125 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 32 & 39.
126 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 49.
127 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 33.

as lucrative commodities, from which he can profit.

The ladies eager to purchase access to the Gentleman Highwayman are not alone in their interest. The *Complete History of James Maclean*'s epistolary narrative also delves into Maclaine's affair with a married woman, whom he seduced in order to gain access to one of her wealthy, and single, acquaintance. Likewise, Plunkett is charged with maintaining the fortune-hunter's relationship with another, unfortunately moneyless, young lady, who is "as willing to receive [his] addresses as [he is] to make them",[128] and is doomed to lose her reputation. In these narratives, the highwayman's romantic success is circumscribed to disreputable women, a claim which is echoed in other accounts of the thief's life.[129] Unlike the London thieves, who are represented as a part of a highly hierarchical underground criminal society, or the highwayman Dick Turpin, who recreates familial and domestic units with his accomplices, the Gentleman-Highwayman and his associate Plunkett do not belong to any circles, although they are able, at least to an extent, to circulate into polite London society. The epistolary narrative contained in the *Complete History* clearly limits their movements to kept mistresses and unfaithful wives, who are used to gain access to their more reputable friends in order to enact failed fortune-hunting schemes.

Another mostly fictional text, the *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M.*, also casts Maclaine as a member of a liminal space, neither legal nor criminal, but defined by the immorality of its members. In a short passage, the heroine, having met with success at the London gaming tables, meets Maclaine, who passes for a gentleman of fortune, while in the countryside, and narrowly avoids being conned into marrying him only because he is arrested in the nick of time.[130] As both adventurers come close to falling for each other's

128 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 22-4, & 29.
129 See for example the *Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 9, in which the highwayman's access to polite circles is provided by notorious kept women.
130 *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M.* (1758-9), II:78-83.

tricks, the courtesan is said to be the only woman seriously to consider Maclaine's proposal: “he...travelled all over England, as a man of fortune, in hopes of picking up a wife, but he could find none who suited him in point of money, and seemed disposed to approve him for her conjugal bed, 'till he paid his addresses to Fanny.”[131] While Fanny and Maclaine are able to circulate in higher social circles, they are both unable to make their place amongst their respectable members.

Unlike the fictional segments inserted, for example, in the Blueskin or the Wild narratives which pad out an otherwise threadbare life story or function as satirical explorations of current issues, the fictional correspondence used in the *Complete History of James Maclean* provides a much more personal depiction of the fortune-hunter. As Maclaine and Plunkett plot, cajole, reproach and negotiate with one another, Maclaine's life smoothly enters the realms of epistolary fiction. Spanning eight letters in total, the majority from Plunkett, the correspondence between the associates is framed by that of two of the Gentleman Highwayman's ruined female victims. While crude and realistic details are inserted in the criminals' letters, such as drunkenness, missed posts, and uncertain destinations, the letters from the young ladies sport the name of romance heroines' such as Selinda or Marian, along with tales of angry parents, betrayed trust, ruined virtues, young ladies going “raving mad”, and tear-stained paper. Through its intimate epistolary narrative, the *Complete History of James Maclean* contrasts the ruined young ladies' distress with the criminals' almost Lovelacean callousness. Plunkett writes: “I can foresee where this Love will end: Why, it will be in your Time and Money spent; the Girl's Virginity and Reputation lost, our Schemes neglected, and your humble Servant half starved”. The fate of the young ladies ruined by the Gentleman Highwayman becomes an explicit warning, designed to “caution young women from being drawn into such

131 *Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M.* (1758-9), II:83.

Company, and deluded by designing Men to their utter Ruin,"[132] and thus moves from life-writing to conduct literature. Replete with tales of fatal social ambitions, intrigues, deceit, and deadly masquerades, accounts of Maclaine contain an otherwise disquieting figure, able to infiltrate upper-class circles undetected through genteel performance, props and backdrops, presenting him as a social upstart altogether unable to mimic 'true' gentility. The Maclaine narratives focus on the usurpation of identities through the manipulation of objects associated with gentility carried out by the fortune-hunter. In turn, this manipulation of commonly accepted markers of identity generates discourses on conduct and social ambition. While the narrators rail against the disruptive potential of costume as a valid marker of status, superficiality and poor education come under fire as the roots of reprehensible behaviour in young ladies, gentlemen, and poor apprentices alike.

The real-life Maclaine is thus altogether obscured by his suitability for the trope of the socially-ambitious, at best corrupt, at worst criminal, Irish fortune-hunter. Even in texts exclusively dedicated to discussing him, it is the possibilities enabled by his fortune-hunting reputation which fascinates his biographers. Indeed, his brand of performative gentility provides a perfect frame to rehearse classic admonitions to naive young ladies, morally-corrupt young gentleman, and ambitious apprentices alike, encompassed within a variety of genres from mock-heroic poems to quasi-richardsonian epistolary narratives. Providing the real-life veneer necessary to make such classic tales exciting, the Maclaine biographies follow each of the highwayman's change of costume and identity as yet another sartorially-marked fiction from which to construct the character of the Gentleman Highwayman, a figure which resonates in much of nineteenth and twentieth century adventure novels. The figure of Maclaine embodies the multifaceted meanings of 'character', from physical possession, to personal identity, legal process, and literary

132 *A Complete History of James Maclean, the Gentleman Highwayman* (1750), 28 & 43.

impersonation, while the highwayman's disturbing invasion of polite circles through costume and disguise is contained and controlled sartorially as irons become “ruffles”.[133]

133 *A Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of James Maclean, Highwayman* (1750), 20.

VII - "Good cloaths of various colours; ... green or blue trim'd with gold; or brown laced with silver":[1] John Rann, alias Sixteen-String Jack

"John Rann, known by the Name of Sixteen-string Jack"[2] in reference to the eight colourful ribbons he wore on each knee, was a highwayman better known for his sartorial extravagance than his successes on the highway. Throughout the last year of his life, he was a common figure in Sir John Fielding's Bow Street office, the Old Bailey, and the London newspapers. He first appeared in the *Public Advertiser* on November 18th, 1773, for a robbery on the highway,[3] and continued to attract journalistic interest until his execution a year later. He featured in close to sixty newspaper articles, excluding advertisements for the multiple biographies published after his final trial. Although Rann was executed in London, the Ordinary of Newgate did not produce an account of his life and behaviour prior to his execution. Interest in publishing criminal lives appears to have waned towards the end of the century. Hence, the *Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts* were no longer published by 1774,[4] an absence which can be felt in other biographies published at the time of Rann's trial and execution. Having lost one of their main sources, they are forced to rely much more on journalistic accounts and trial records. On the other hand, Rann does feature extensively in the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, which kept records of his involvement in three trials for highway robbery in December 1773, as well as in July and in October 1774 respectively. These texts describe the trials in much more detail; witness accounts are taken down verbatim instead of simply summarised, a shift which goes hand

1 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* (London: Printed for, and Sold by T. Sabine, No. 17, in New Street, Shoe Lane; Lewis Tomlinson, Stationer and Bookseller, No. 124, White Chapel [1774?]), 7.
2 *Public Advertiser,* Jul. 28, 1774.
3 The same report was also published, in a slightly edited form, in the *London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*, Nov. 16-18,' and the *London Evening Post*, Nov. 18-20.
4 The last *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* was published in October 1772.

in hand with the change of policing and prosecution style introduced by the Fielding brothers and their Bow street magistrates.[5]

Advertisements found in London newspapers indicate that at least three separate biographies were published immediately after Rann's execution. Of these, two have proved impossible to find: the *Genuine Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen String Jack, with anecdotes of Miss Roche and other persons connected with him*, and advertised in the *Public Advertiser*,[6] and the *London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*;[7] and the *Genuine Memoirs of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-String Jack ... among which are introduced some curious anecdotes of Miss Smith...*, printed for T. Axtell and J. Whitaker, and advertised in the *London Evening Post*[8] and the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*.[9] Another biography, the *Circumstantial Narrative of John Rann, otherwise called Sixteen-String Jack, and Miss Roach*, printed for and sold by T. Sabine, A. Henderson and Lewis Tomlinson was advertised in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*.[10] Although no account of that name can be found, the same booksellers produced the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* the same year,[11] which is probably based on, if is not in fact that first publication.

A third independent biography, the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack*,[12] went through at least two (undated) editions whose printer is only

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5 For an in-depth analysis of the Bow Street magistrates and their effects on crime detection and prosecution, see James Beattie's recent monograph, *The first English detectives : the Bow Street Runners and the policing of London, 1750-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

6 *Public Advertiser,* Nov. 2, 1774.

7 *London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*, Nov. 3-5, 1774.

8 *London Evening Post*, Nov. 12-15, 1774.

9 *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser,* Nov. 14, 1774.

10 *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser,* Nov. 10, 1774.

11 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([London, 1774?]).

12 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford; Containing His Adventures and Enterprises, his numerous Escapes from Justice, and his Amours with several Ladies. Among which is introduced, Some curious Anecdotes of Miss Smith and Miss Roche, his favourite Dulcineas. To which is added*

identified as “Bailey”. Since there is no description of Rann's execution in spite of heavy newspaper coverage, from which a large portion of the text is taken, it is probable that this account went to print either before or immediately after his death.[13] Both editions are of poor quality, with numerous typographical errors and factual inaccuracies. Both the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* and the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* heavily rely on the *Old Bailey Proceedings* for much of their content.

Rann also features in printed collections of criminal biographies, such as that published by the then Ordinary of Newgate, John Villette, in 1776, the *Annals of Newgate; or, Malefactor's Register*;[14] the *Malefactors' Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn calendar*[15] and its 1791 iteration; Sir James Montagu's *Old Bailey Chronicle*;[16] and William Jackson's *New and complete Newgate calendar; or, Villany displayed in all its branches*.[17] The biographies of Rann included in these collections can be divided in two groups, all based on the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack*. Each of these texts attempt to correct the most flagrant mistakes in the *Genuine Account*, in which

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Some Strictures on the Penal Laws, and a particular Account of Lane and Trotman, executed at the same Time for the barbarous Robbery of Mr. Floyd, in a Coach, near Chelsea (London: Bailey, Printer, [1774?)].

13 This biography might be based on the text of the lost *Genuine Memoirs*. Not only are their full titles extremely similar (*A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed November 30th, 1774, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford; containing His Adventures and Enterprises, his numerous Escapes from Justice, and his Amours with several Ladies. Among which is introduced Some Curious Anecdotes of Miss Smith and Miss Roche, his favorite Dulcineas* vs *The Genuine Memoirs of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-String Jack, now under sentence of death in Newgate, for a robbery on the Highway, near Brentford; containing his adventures and enterprizes, his numerous escapes from justice, and his amours with several noted ladies. Among which are introduced some curious anecdotes of Miss Smith, of Covent Garden, his favourite Dulcinea*. Emphasis on shared phrases), but borrowings and adaptation of earlier texts are common practices for biographies of criminals.

14 “Memoirs of the Life and Trial of John Rann alias Sixteen-string Jack, for Robbery” *VANM76*, IV:378-388.

15 “A full and particular Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged for a Robbery on the Highway” *MR79*, V:138-146.

16 “John Rann, alias Sixteen-String Jack, for Robbery” *MOBC88*, 134-148.

17 “Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged at Tyburn for a Robbery on the Highway” *JNCN95*, 138-146. Rann is also a popular subject for nineteenth-century criminal biographers; however, as they are published far beyond the scope of this study, these later texts will not be discussed.

two of Rann's mistresses, Miss Roche and Miss Smith, are completely interchangeable. While the *Annals of Newgate* and the *Old Bailey Chronicle* identify Miss Smith as Rann's main partner, both editions of the *Malefactor's Register* as well as the *New and Complete Newgate Calendar* choose Roche instead. These two groups also differ slightly in their introductory remarks, but the rest of their content remains very similar. Finally, Sixteen-String Rann also becomes a somewhat common reference in reports on other criminals immediately after his execution, even featuring in a short poem on the title page of another account, that of John Overan, along with other well known criminals: "The noted Cox, or William Hawkes, / Sixteen-String Jack, alias Rann; - / Read this Hero's Account – And he's [t]he Man".[18]

Rann's early years are difficult to reconstruct, and his biographers disagree on his birthplace as well as his level of education and first employments. The following biography can nonetheless be pieced together from available legal and journalistic records. He was born circa 1750, either around Bath or in London according to his contemporary biographers, but no parish records of his baptism can be found.[19] By 1773, he was leading a life of crime in the metropolis, possibly following a stint as a gentleman's servant or postilion. His first recorded arrest came in November 1773, for robbing the Hampstead stagecoach. He was tried with three of his accomplices, the fourth giving evidence against them, in December 1773. Reported as an "exceeding civil" robbery, and in the absence of conclusive identification by the victims, they were all acquitted.[20] Although all of his accomplices were able to provide character evidence in their favour, from neighbours, past

18 *The Genuine Life &c. of John Overan, otherwise John Williams, Who was capitally Convicted on Thursday the 8th Day of December, 1774, for robbing Mr. Venables, in the Tower, of Three Bank Notes, and Money to the Amount of 80l.* (London: Printed by J. Miller, White-lion-Street, Goodman's fields [1774/5?]).Overan is also compared to Rann in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* and the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* both Jan. 12, 1775.

19 Philip Sugden, "Rann, John (*c.*1750–1774)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008).

20 *OBP* "December 1773, trial of John Rann, William Davis, otherwise Scarlet, David Monro, John Saunders" (t17731208-1).

employers, or family members, Rann did not produce any witnesses, from which one could infer that he could not claim membership to any 'respectable' London community.

Philip Sudgen, in his entry on Rann for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, places his next trial at the Old Bailey in April. While there are no records of a 'John Rann' amongst the accused, the April proceedings did include a 'John Rand', a possible misspelling of Rann's name, indicted for assault and acquitted.[21] Rann was then tried in the summer with his mistress, Catherine Smith, for the theft of a watch and seven guineas from the passenger of a chaise near Hounslow. Both were acquitted, again due to the lack of formal identification by the victim. This trial marks the first appearance of the nickname 'Sixteen-Strings Jack' in the London newspapers.[22] He was soon brought in front of a magistrate again, following a midnight attempt to enter a house in Bow Street, but was let go once its female occupant testified that he was in fact expected, and would have been let in had he not been so late that she had fallen asleep.[23]

His final trial came in October of the same year, once again for highway robbery, against the Reverend William Bell, chaplain to Princess Amelia, the previous September. He stood trial with his accomplice, William Collier, his current mistress, Eleanor Roche, who had testified against him and Smith the preceding July, and her servant Christian Stewart. On information from a pawnbroker who was offered a suspicious watch by Roche and Stewart, the thieves were arrested by Sir John Fielding's Bow Street officers. Bell's semi-conclusive identification of the robbers was corroborated by evidence from one of Princess Amelia's postilion, who saw Rann, answering the description of the robbers given

21 *OBP* “April 1774, trial of John Rand, William Clayton, Robert Sheppard” (t17740413-58).

22 *General Evening Post*, May 31-Jun. 2, 1774. The same report was printed in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, Jun. 2, 1774, and *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser*, May 31-Jun. 2, 1774. The same report was also published in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Jun. 2, 1774.

23 The same incident is mentioned, albeit slightly differently, in three separate newspapers. The *Public Advertiser*, Jul. 28, 1774, reports that Rann and an accomplice, Thomas Latham, were attempting to visit a woman of the town. The *Public Ledger* of the same day asserts that he was instead cohabiting with one of the female occupants, and does not mention an accomplice, a report corroborated by the *Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, Jul. 30, 1774, which calls his attempt a 'piece of gallantry'.

by the chaplain, in the same area.[24] Rann and Collier were both sentenced to death (Collier was later pardoned), and Roche to transportation. Rann was hanged on the 30th of November, in front of a crowd estimated at 17,000 strong by the *Public Advertiser*.[25]

Depictions of Rann's relationship with objects is almost entirely confined to items of clothing and accessories. Not only does his booty mainly consist of accessories such as watches and jewelry, his celebrity is rooted in his distinct sartorial appearance. Unlike Maclaine, who aspires to pass as a genteel member of the upper class, Rann creates his own popular gentility, based on criminal loyalties, sociability, and flamboyant attire. Both newspapers and biographies describe his extravagant apparel, which they tell us he himself carefully adapts to different public situations. Indeed, even Boswell comments on Rann's appearance in his *Life of Johnson:*

> Boswell. 'Does not Gray's poetry, Sir, tower above the common mark?'
> Johnson. 'Yes, Sir; but we must attend to the difference between what men in general cannot do if they would, and what every man may do if he would. Sixteen-string Jack towered above the common mark.'

A footnote limits the 'genius' of the criminal to his sense of style: “A noted highwayman, who after having been several times tried and acquitted, was at last hanged. He was remarkable for foppery in his dress, and particularly for wearing a bunch of sixteen strings at the knees of his breeches”[26]

Rann's control over objects is entirely focused on his appearance, as he redefines both popular masculinity and gentility through his choice of attire. In this chapter, I

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24 *OBP* “October 1774, trial of John Rann, William Collier, Eleanor Roache, Christian Stewart” (t17741019-50).

25 *Public Advertiser,* Dec. 1, 1774. Many newspapers covered Rann's execution, most of which publishing the same account as the *Public Advertiser. S*ee the *General Evening Post,* Nov. 29-Dec.1, 1774; the *Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, Dec. 3, 1774; and the *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser*, Nov. 29- Dec.1, 1774. The *General Evening Post*, Dec.1-3, and Dec.6-8, 1774, describes Rann's behaviour in the days leading up to his execution and his refusal to speak at the gallows, and also provides a short account of his life.

26 James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. Vol. 3: *The Life (1776-1780)* (Edited by George Birkbeck Norman Hill and L. F. Powell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 38.

explore the ramifications of Rann's dedication to eccentric fashion, not only in terms of gender and control, but also as a symptom of the decline of interest in popular criminal literature. I argue that Rann's claim to celebrity, while similar to Sheppard's in that it is founded in his ability to manipulate the material world, is ultimately corrupted and feminised not only by his focus on sartorial matters, but also through changing cultural attitudes towards criminality.

VII.1 Ribbons, boots and horses

Both journalistic and biographical accounts focus heavily on Rann's dress, presenting it not only as an identifying feature, but also as an object of interest in its own right. As such, Rann's clothing receives as much, if not more, attention than his actions or behaviour. This attention to the minutiae of his apparel ranges from explanations of his nickname, Sixteen-String, to detailed descriptions of his clothing on separate occasions. The *Malefactor's Register* thus describes the origins of his alias:

> About four years before his execution, he was coachman to a gentleman of fortune ... and it was at this period that he dressed in the manner which gave rise to the appellation of Sixteen-strings Jack, by wearing breeches with eight strings at each knee. After living in the service of several noblemen, he lost his character, and turned pick-pocket.[27]

Rann's unusual accessorisation is not linked to the greater wealth achieved by his thefts. Instead, his extravagance predates his descent into crime, and is linked to his employment as a servant. Here, the highwayman does not attempt to dress above his rank, turning instead to flashy, yet affordable, accessories to personalise his appearance. However, Rann's love of finery becomes fully expressed once he turns to highway robberies, as the thief turns to colourful clothes, trimmed with expensive materials. The *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* describes Rann's general appearance in the

27 "A full and particular Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged for a Robbery on the Highway" *MR79,* V:138-139.

following manner: “By his clandestine practices he was enabled to appear in all the dress of a gentleman, wearing exceedinig [sic] good cloaths of various colours; such as green or blue trim'd with gold; or brown laced with silver; his hat had either a narrow gold or silver lace round it”.[28] Unlike Maclaine, who strived to pass as a gentleman, Rann merely adopts the items of clothing made newly affordable by his criminal activities.

In spite of Rann's lack of interest in upward social mobility, his ostentatious choices in apparel are nonetheless used to comment on his behaviour. The *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* thus parallels the description of his rich clothes to that of his poor judgment, creating the image of a foppish and rather unwise beau:

> When Rann was brought down to take his trial, he appeared very careless and indifferent, having by no means a proper sense of the unfortunate and truly wretched situation in which all the spectators viewed him. He was dressed in a new coat and waistcoat of pea green cloth, with new buckskin breeches, ruffled shirt, and a hat bound round with silver strings.[29]

Rann's clothing are a defining feature of his character for his biographers. The *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* remains one of the most critical versions of the highwayman's life, constantly calling attention to his alleged impudence and lack of judgment, here demonstrated through his bizarre selection of attire. However, Rann's sartorial experiments are not limited to that of the fashionable fop. Instead, Sixteen-String Jack uses accessories in order to take control of and personalise not only his own appearance, but also the objects of legal and penal power.

Just as Jack Sheppard did fifty years earlier, John Rann attempts to redefine the instruments of his incarceration, his shackles. However, where Sheppard took control of his irons in the somewhat limited privacy of his cell, using his skill as a locksmith to remove them at will, Rann's brand of material defiance involves one of his favourite

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28 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 7.

29 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache*. ([1774?]), 22.

ornaments, ribbons, and the very public setting of the courtroom. According to the London papers, "John Ran [sic], otherwise Sixteen-string Jack, was brought to the bar, his irons were bound round and tied up with blue ribbons, and he wore a nosegay in his bosom as big as a birch broom".[30] This attempt to corrupt the symbols of his status as an object under judiciary control personalises his irons into a fashionable accessory. While shackles were commonly compared to items of clothing in criminal literature,[31] Rann's rather unsubtle perversion of penal power backfires: instead of highlighting his agency as a subject, the highwayman's outfit serves to underline his folly. Both the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* and the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* comment on his appearance for his second trial, calling attention to its extravagance and condemning his apparent disregard for the seriousness of the legal proceedings of the day. While the *Genuine Account* echoes the newspapers' description of Rann's nosegay (“he had a nosegay of flowers in the bosom of his coat full as large as a common birch broom”), and details the length of ribbons used by the highwayman (“sixteen yards of blue ribbon”, that is, close to fifteen meters),[32] the *Malefactors' Register* pairs the highwayman's appearance with condemnation of his sartorial ambition: “On this occasion Rann was dressed in a manner above his stile of life and his circumstances. He had a bundle of flowers in the breast of his coat, almost as large as a broom; and his irons were tied up with a number of blue ribbands”.[33] Reminiscent of Malviolo, the socially ambitious and much derided steward of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, and his colourful

30 *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser,* May 31-Jun. 2, 1774. The same account was also published in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Jun.2, 1774. Another report, published in the *General Evening Post,* May 31-Jun. 2, 1774, and the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser,* Jun. 2, 1774, states that "During this examination, Rann behaved with the most consummate assurance; had a remarkable large nosegay in his bosom, and his fetters decorated with ribbands."

31 See for example my discussion of irons in chapters III and VI, focused on John Sheppard and James Maclaine, respectively.

32 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 13.

33 “A full and particular Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged for a Robbery on the Highway” *MR79,* V:140.

stockings and cross garter, Rann's accoutrement embodies his misunderstanding of legal rituals, in a gesture which becomes ridiculed, instead of empowering. Although he is acquitted on this occasion, Rann fails to subvert his irons effectually, and abandons these embellishments for his final trial the next October, during which he is richly, but more plainly, dressed. However, while this attempt brings condemnation instead of admiration of his agency, Rann's ability to adapt his appearance is not always unsuccessful.

Rann's particular sense of fashion made him immediately recognisable amongst the London crowds. His choice of accessories was unusual enough for either upper- or lower-class beaus to have generated his descriptive nickname, as exemplified by John Villette's description in the *Annals of Newgate*:

> Sixteen-string Jack was about twenty-four years of age, about five feet five inches high, wore his own hair, of a light brown colour, which combed over his fore-head, remarkably clean, and particularly neat in his dress, which in two instances was very singular, that of always having sixteen strings to his breeches knees, always of silk (by which means he acquired his ficticious name) and a remarkable hat with strings, and a button on the crown: he was straight, of a genteel carriage, and makes a very handsome appearance.[34]

Rann would have been easily recognised had he committed any thefts dressed in his usual style, especially as he was taken to Sir John Fielding's office on at least three different occasions, during which his appearance would have been recorded. Descriptions of his adorned breeches by any theft victim would have identified him immediately. Prosecution and sentencing of thefts relied heavily on the formal identification of criminals by their victims, and any atypical personal characteristic made this process easier. Rann avoided a death sentence on two occasions due to the lack of direct proof of his involvement, in spite of the testimony of two of his accomplices. Dr. Bell's evidence at Rann's final trial is thus very much concerned with the appearance of the thieves:

> my attention was attracted by two men on horse-back, who were before me ... Something appearing singular about the head of the first man. I took my glass

34 "Memoirs of the Life and Trial of John Rann alias Sixteen-string Jack, for Robbery" *VANM76*, IV:379.

> out of my pocket to see what it was; I found it was the flap of his hat let down all round, probably without strings, and a red handkerchief upon it ... their dress and appearance being something singular, attracted my notice to see what they were;... the hindermost man was clothed in a lightish coat, a hat flapped round, a great deal of black hair hanging loosely about his head, and his horse was something of a kind of brown, though I took no particular notice. The first man I observed to be in a frock mourning coat, buttoned; I likewise observed, as I passed by him, that his horse was black and very low in flesh; it struck me that his boot was shorter than boots commonly are, and there appeared over it something of a light coloured stocking; I took notice likewise that his boots were very dirty, and his hair was loose about his head, but not in so large a quantity as the man I first came up to; the man that I first came up to I observed to be of a very sallow countenance and of a sickly look ; the other was not sallow or sickly.[35]

The chaplain went on to recognise Rann in Sir John Fielding's office, and the highwayman's presence in the area was confirmed by one of Princess Amelia's postilion. Bell and Villette (who was ordinary of Newgate at the time of Rann's incarceration) thus provide diametrically opposing descriptions, from particular neatness to plain, dirty clothes. Although it is not entirely clear from the chaplain's testimony which of the riders was Rann,[36] either robbers appear extremely different from flashy Sixteen-String Jack. Rann was then well able to adapt his clothing to circumstances, and avoid recognition during his criminal activities through disguise. Switching from popular beau to ragged highwayman, the thief uses sartorial appearances to his advantage.

However, Rann does not simply manipulate existing connotations attached to clothing. Instead, his sartorial experiments seek to assign new meaning to the material aspects of his appearance. While his attempt to personalise, and hence subdue, his irons backfires, his next venture serves to declare his innocence amongst his fellow prisoners. Rann's appearance during his final trip to Tyburn is carefully staged, and designed to

35 ”Dr. William Bell's deposition” *OBP* (t17741019-50).

36 From Bell's description, Rann was probably the man in a mourning coat, riding a black horse. However, his testimony is not entirely clear: he identifies Rann as the man who robbed him, while Collier remained behind and did not interact with him; earlier in his account, he mentions that the man on the black horse came up to him and asked for his money, threatening to “blow [his] brains out”, *OBP* (t17741019-50), which points to Rann as the owner of the short and dirty boots. However, he does not unequivocally link this description with either of the accused.

ingratiate himself with the huge audience assembled to watch his execution. Although most biographies do not describe his execution, focusing instead on his amours and his trials, the London newspapers comprehensively report on his final moments:

> Rann and Jones lifted up their Eyes and Hands with Emotions of Torment not to be described …. Rann was elegantly dressed in a new Suit of light Blue, and himself, as well as Coleby and Jones, had new Caps tied with black Ribbands. ... It was remarked that Rann wore a Hatband and white Ribbands, the latter said to be intended as a Declaration of his Innocence. Two Hearses attended, that for Rann being drawn by four Horses.[37]

An exercise in collective fashion, the identical caps and ribbons of the condemned not only add to the solemnity of the moment, but also allow Rann to distance himself from his companions. The highwayman asserts his innocence through his white ribbons, made the more noticeable by the matching caps worn by Jones and Coleby, who were sentenced to death for housebreaking, as well as his superior status through his funeral arrangements. Standing out through his white ornaments, Rann is also portrayed as particularly aware of the potential implications and significatory capacities of his clothing choices: the *General Evening Post* reports that "he said in prison, that he would not wish to be thought to die in an impudent manner; now would he have gone in his hat adorned with a crepe hatband and white cockades, if he had not been told it was decent".[38] While the white ribbons could indicate his innocence, they could also be construed as an act of daring, evocative of the white panache worn by courageous commanders in battle. This accessory simultaneously allowed them to be seen by their troops, but also made them an easy target for the enemy. The highwayman does not manipulate the material world by using and abusing significant objects designed to control him. Rather, he takes ownership of these objects by assigning them new meanings, as his position as a subject depends entirely on the public

37 *General Evening Post*, Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 1774. The same account was also published in the *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser,* Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 1774, the *Public Advertiser,* Dec. 1, 1774, and the *Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, Dec. 3, 1774.

38 *General Evening Post*, Dec. 6-8, 1774. The same report was also published in two numbers of the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Dec. 9 and Dec. 17, 1774.

interpretation of his sartorial experiments, and not on any kind of enforced agency such as that portrayed in the Sheppard narratives.

However, Rann does not only redefine the meaning of objects; he is himself defined by the objects he surrounds himself with. His status as a highwayman is thus entirely rooted in a number of significant items related to his trade: his horses, pistols and boots. The pair of boots mentioned in Dr. Bell's testimony is repeatedly referred to in both legal and biographical records of his final trial, and as often mentioned in journalistic accounts of his arrests. The *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser*'s report of his arrest in the summer of 1774 states that "the prisoner came booted and spurred in a coach",[39] while reports on the investigation surrounding the Bell case inevitably point out the presence of Rann's dirty boots in Eleanor Roach's lodgings.[40] Coupled with the presence of horses, the dirty boots are enough to designate him as a highwayman. The horses themselves, which were apparently hired for the occasion by Rann and Collier, were also used as a means of identifying the thieves: Hannah Cragg, who lodged in the same house as Roach, testifies that “there were two horses walked about the door some time; soon after somebody opened the parlour door and paid for the horses…. They were so low in flesh I could hardly tell [their colour]; one seemed of a blackish colour, the other rather brown”.[41] Another tool of the highwayman's trade, the firearm, is also used as an incriminating factor in arrests. The *Public Advertiser* thus reports that a young man was apprehended for a highwayman as he

39 *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser,* May 31-Jun. 2, 1774. This description also appears in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Jun. 2, 1774.

40 The *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post,* Sep. 27-29, 1774, states that "The Constables seized Roche and Stuart, and found in her Lodgings two Pair of Boots, which appeared wet and dirty”, while the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Sep. 29, 1774, mentions that "on searching the apartment of Miss Roche, two pair of very dirty boots, (which had been just pulled off) were found". Finally, the *Public Advertiser* of the same day indicates that "a Peace Officer, went to Roche's Lodgings, where he found two Pair of Boots, very wet and dirty, which had been evidently worn that Day”. The *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* ([1774?]) also comments on Rann's footwear, noting that “when Rann came home he was booted and spurred”, and, later, that “[the peace Officer] found there two pair of boots, very wet and dirty, which had evidently been worn that way”, 14, & 19.

41 *OBP* (t17741019-50).

was seen riding and handling a pair of pistols, about which he "said the Pistols were made a Present to him by the celebrated John Rann, alias Sixteen String Jack".[42] Rann and his accomplices were taken for trial as “on searching them, they found some shot in the pocket of Monro, and a pistol in the room, loaded with a slug, upon which they were taken into custody”.[43] Horses and pistols, when in the hands of young lower class men, here serve as shorthand for highway robbery, and are used as evidence in arrests and trials. Finally, the presence of horses, no matter how skeletal, is still sufficient to separate the highwayman from less reputable felons.

VII.2 Fame, belonging and gentility

Rann's status as a highwayman places him at the top of criminal hierarchies according to his biographies. The *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack*, which takes a much more sympathetic view of the thief than the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack*, clearly ranks robbing on horseback much higher than other criminal activities. Through his preferred robbing methods, Rann avoids the criticism linked to more violent crimes: according to the *Genuine Account*, “he never was charged with the epithet of being a midnight burghlar [sic], nor that of an inhuman and dastardly footpad, who lays wait for the unwary passenger, not only to plunder him of his property, but sometimes of his life, and under colour of the night escapes with impunity”.[44] The relationship between footpads and highwaymen mirrors that between burglary and house breaking, the cover of night intrinsically rendering the offence more serious. The *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack*'s

42 *Public Advertiser,* Aug. 18, 1774.
43 “Memoirs of the Life and Trial of John Rann alias Sixteen-string Jack, for Robbery” *VANM76*, IV:380.This passage was directly adapted from the *Old Bailey Proceedings* of December 1773, *OBP* (t17731208-1).
44 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 4.

general criminal hierarchy, or “Class of Desperadoes”, remains rather unoriginal, with the noble highwayman at its head, and the receivers of stolen goods, “those worst of wretches” at its bottom.[45] The distinction between each type is rooted not only in the risk they are taking, but also in their propensity to use violence:

> However atrocious the crime of robbing on the Highway may at first appear, yet certain it is, there are many offences of a much heavier Nature that have received Mercy: among those are Murders, Burglaries, Forgeries, and murdering Street-Robbers: Whilst the Highwayman, in his attack, exposes himself to many Dangers, commonly for a very small Booty, and seldom or ever behaves ill to those, whom frequently his Misfortunes have laid him under the Necessity of levying Contributions from.[46]

In this classic contrast with other criminals,[47] the highwayman is presented as an essentially non-violent, and even courageous, thief. The highwayman's alleged civility does not however bear scrutiny: not only are firearms an indispensable part of the his equipment, threats of violence are an inherent aspect of highway robbery, either on foot or on horseback. John Villette, then Ordinary of Newgate, thus describes one of Rann's first highway thefts in his *Annals of Newgate*:

> they behaved very civil, and rather seemed to beg for money than use any violent means, though he observed a pistol in one of their hands ... the coachman deposed, that ... one of them held a pistol up to him and said, 'If you do not stop, I will blow your brains out,' upon which he desired him to put the pistol down, which he accordingly did, and behaved exceeding civil.[48]

Menacing to “blow [the victim's] brains out” proves a recurring feature of Rann's robberies; he reportedly made the same threat to Dr. Bell.[49] In Rann's case, this discrepancy between the highwayman's prestige and his actions is carried over to another aspect of his reputation, his character.

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45 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 30, & 5.

46 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 30.

47 See my discussion of the relationship between footpad and highwaymen in my Blueskin and Turpin chapters, and that of housebreaker and receivers in my Sheppard and Wild chapters.

48 “Memoirs of the Life and Trial of John Rann alias Sixteen-string Jack, for Robbery” *VANM76*, IV:380.This passage was adapted from *OBP* (t17731208-1), which records Rann's trial.

49 *OBP* (t17741019-50).

In spite of his status as a highwayman, Rann is often ridiculed by his biographers, especially for his love of finery. Whereas the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* details his "open, honest looking countenance [which] is such as would rather prepossess a stranger in his favour",[50] other texts list a long list of unappealing qualities. The *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* thus laments "that the unfortunate man was verbose, quarrelsome, and ready to fly into passions, anger, and other irregular extremes, in which he discovered an imprudence incompatible with any degree of judgment or solidity".[51] Meanwhile, the *Malefactor's Register* notes that "Rann's general character was that of a bold, ignorant, fellow ... fond of boasting of his exploits in all companies, without regards to his personal safety. He was exceedingly apt to be quarrelsome when in liquor, and fond of fighting with almost any man he might meet in the street".[52] Even the most sympathetic account of Rann's life, the *Genuine Account*, admits to its subject's dangerous propensities: "by a mistaken vanity, in boasting of those very actions which every honest heart must shudder at the relation of, and every vicious mind tremble at the reward of such iniquitous proceedings". [53]

However, it is not only the highwayman's character which is found reprehensible. While his extravagant appearance serves to condemn him as a man of poor sense, it is also used in order to cast him as a ridiculous, mock-heroic figure. In the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack,* Rann's attempt at polite sociability is an utter failure, in spite of his elaborate attire, and ends in a hudibrastic defenestration by young men tired of his drunken misconduct:

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50 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 8.

51 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 10.

52 "A full and particular Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged for a Robbery on the Highway" *MR79,* V:145.

53 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 3.

> The Sunday following our hero appeared at Bagnigge-Wells, elegantly dressed in a scarlet coat, a tambour waistcoat, white silk stockings, laced hat, &c. and publickly declared himself to be a highwayman …. [A] number of young fellow ... attacked this magnanimous hero [who was drunk and turbulent], and forced him through the window into the road. This so derogatory to his honour, ruffled him so much that he uttered the most horrid execrations against the frequenters of Bagnigge-Wells, for the indignity they had shewn to a gentleman of his figure.[54]

Lacking the eponymous ribbons at his breeches, and instead disguised as a member of the upper classes, Rann fails to perform the part of the polite gentleman. Set in one of London's polite leisure centres, Bagnigge-Wells, this scene highlights Rann's complete inability to emulate upper-class sociability beyond his adoption of their more extravagant sartorial choices. Unlike Maclaine, whose genteel behaviour allowed him to pass amongst London polite circles, Rann is unable to adapt his behaviour, and his rich clothes remain a costume which he cannot own. While they experienced different degrees of success in their acts of passing amongst the London polite society, both criminals fail to impersonate the "polite town gentleman" who, according to Philip Carter, synthesised "external manners with an inner virtue based on a Christian morality which theorists considered a necessary requirement for participation in polite society."[55] The mock-heroic vocabulary used in this passage ("magnanimous hero"), coupled with tongue-in-cheek references to the highwayman's honour and gentility, focus the satire directly on the lower-class beau. While, according to the *OED*, the verb 'ruffle' could be used to signify "to handle or tousle (someone) with rude familiarity", it could also be applied to materials, that is "to destroy the smoothness or evenness of; to spoil the regular or neat arrangement of; to rumple (cloth, the skin, etc.); to crumple (paper)". This pairing of 'ruffle' and 'honour' blurs the

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54 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 16. The same account can also be found in "Memoirs of the Life and Trial of John Rann alias Sixteen-string Jack, for Robbery" *VANM76*, IV:385, with very small alterations ('figure' is changed into 'character'), as well as in the *Genuine Account* ([1774?]), 17.

55 Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 10.

divide between the highwayman's honour and his attire, hinting at their equivalence. Where, in the Wild narratives, gentility was constructed as a 'put on' which could be manipulated at will by the skillful criminal, Rann is unable to take full control of his disguise, remaining at best suspicious, and at worst transparent.

Yet, Rann is seldom described as aspiring to upper-class propriety. Instead, he adopts a different kind of gentility, peculiar to members of the lower classes. His relationship with his accomplices is thus one of complete loyalty, a code of honour that he maintains even when broken by less dependable companions: according to John Villette's *Annals of Newgate*,

> With some of those [partners in crime] he entered into solemn engagements to be true and stedfast [sic] to each other: nor was the fulfilling of these covenants ever wanting on his part; for, at the various times he has been in danger and distress, and strongly solicited to make an impeachment of his accomplices, by which he might have made considerable advantages, he always nobly refused, saying – 'That as he always kept company with Gentlemen, on whose Honour and Fidelity he had the strongest reliance, he would never be the first who should bring disgrace upon so sacred a name, by renouncing those engagements which every Man of Honour ought to keep inviolate.[56]

Here, gentility and politeness no longer associated. Instead, honour and loyalty make the gentleman, whose social status is unimportant. The *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* shows the highwayman upholding this ideal even in arrest: “Rann complained that [two Sherriffs Officers] had not treated him like a gentleman. When Sir John Fieldings [sic] people come after me (said he) they use me genteelly; they only hold up their fingers, beckon, and I follow them as quiet as a lamb”.[57] Unable to perform upper class gentility, Rann adopts an alternate type of gentlemanly behaviour reminiscent of that displayed by John Sheppard. Unlike the escapist however, Rann's fame is based not on impressive manual and physical skills, but on his unusual appearance. His

56 “Memoirs of the Life and Trial of John Rann alias Sixteen-string Jack, for Robbery” *VANM76,* IV:379.

57 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 17.

popularity is hence more problematic than that of Sheppard, and is construed as impudence.

In addition to drunken, and reportedly common, public confessions, Rann is also described as aware of, if not sometimes overestimating, his celebrity status. In the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack,* Rann asks a toll-man whether Sir John Fielding's men had been looking for him, and exclaims: "'What do not you know me.' 'No.' 'Why, I am Sixteen string Jack, the famous Highwayman.'".[58] He then asks the toll-man to inform the officers of his return to town. Such imprudent displays are framed, in the Rann narratives, by complaints from his narrators about his attention-seeking behaviours, borne out by his dress and behaviour during his trials. For the narrator of the *Account of John Rann,* his biography should be printed, "not so much on account of the atrociousness of his crimes, as for the folly and wickedness discoverable in every scene of the unfortunate subject at present before us".[59] He is later said to have entered the court

> with audacity [sic, missing word] than was ever observed in any other person in the like circumstance... [he]"assumed an air of gaiety and affectation, ill becoming his situation, and at the same time betraying a low turn of mind; the common effect of ignorance and its natural and almost inseperable [sic] companion, impudence.[60]

In addition to attracting condemnation in accounts of his life, Rann's unashamed behaviour is also singled out as the cause of his demise. The *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* thus surmises that "there is more than probable reason to think, Rann would have escaped the punishment of his crime this time, had his character not have been so notoriously bad, and his name standing so often upon record at the Old Bailey".[61] Rann's character, which he lost as a servant and was unable to regain through

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58 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 18.

59 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 5.

60 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 12-15.

61 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November*

links with honest local communities, is tangibly injured by his celebrity as well as his public persona. Instead of gaining him support from potentially influential well-wishers, Rann's fame lowers his chances for a pardon as his reputation is utterly ruined not only through his criminal activities, but also through the suspicious feminisation of his character.

VII.3 Women, men and femininity

In many criminal biographies, lower-class women and their loose morals are squarely blamed for young men's introduction to the capital's criminal underworld. The Rann narratives do not diverge from this stereotype, which has become so commonplace that it is reflected even in the vocabulary of redemption: the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* thus describes Sir John Fielding's attempt to reason with Rann "with a view possible to save the infatuated young man".[62] The few women featuring in accounts of the highwayman's life function as ciphers, with no characterisation save that provided by their testimonies at the Old Bailey. Both the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* and the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* provide short (and rather vague) biographies of Rann's main mistresses, Catherine Smith and Eleanor Roache. Their path to crime stems from vanity and prostitution, and both young women become kept mistresses before embarking on a downward spiral which ends in street prostitution. Rann's own demise is brought about by his passion for a demanding young woman. A short biography published in several London newspapers following his execution thus explains that

> he had lived in many reputable places, and might have done exceeding well, had he not unfortunately had an attachment for a lady. ... She having once been the kept mistress of a nobleman, the finances of Jack were not adequate to

30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford ([1774?]), 24.

62 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 8.

> maintain the Dulcinea …. He therefore had recourse to that method of supporting her extravagance, which he, and many others, have experienced the fatal effects of.[63]

Just like Sheppard, Rann is pushed into theft by the demands of his female companions. The *Malefactors' Register* thus warns against corrupting young women, entreating, "from the fate of this unhappy youth, let others be taught never to embark in an illicit connexion with women of ill fame. It is the ready and certain path to destruction, from which nothing can so effectually guard young men as a steady adherence to the rules of virtue and religion".[64] Rann's own defense during his second trial reflects that trope, as he accuses Eleanor Roache, who testified against him, of lying about the robbery in order to punish him for not taking her as a mistress:

> I know nothing in the world of this robbery; all is false; I have known this woman for a considerable time; I think this is out of malice; she has often applied to me to take her; I had refused; I have sometimes let her have things; I gave her some shoes. ... It is all out of revenge because I would not keep her.[65]

The intimacy implied by this exchange of clothing was minimised by Roache in her testimony as she admits that someone had given her shoes, but claims that she could not remember whom. Rann's defense sketches an aggressive, demanding and morally unsound woman, whose desires must be met no matter the cost to naive young men. The means of his arrests (both 1774 trials indict Rann for highway robbery, and one of his mistresses for receiving stolen goods, which seizure as the women attempted to monetise them led the authorities directly to Rann), Rann's mistresses only function as corrupting influences and weakest links in the criminal community.

The women in the Rann narratives thus never function as fully-fledged subjects, and

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63 *General Evening Post*, Dec. 6-8, 1774. The same biography was also published twice in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Dec. 9 and Dec. 17, 1774.

64 "A full and particular Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged for a Robbery on the Highway" *MR79*, V:145-146. This passage is followed by a footnote advertising a new publication, the *Lover's New Guide*, which aims to warn young people off Rann's path and teach them to combine love and virtue.

65 *OBP* (t17740706-49).

function, to borrow from the final song of the *Beggar's Opera*, like Rann's "Doxies around". Furthermore, the confusion arising from Rann's intimate relationship with both Catherine Smith and Eleanor Roache designates the mistresses as completely interchangeable. Both 1774 biographies quote the *Old Bailey Proceedings* of his trial extensively, and somewhat accurately. The remainder of both the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann* and the *Account of John Rann*, however, rely on scant journalistic reports and other unknown sources, and they are entirely unable to ascertain the correct identity of each woman. The role of Rann's female nemesis is taken variously by Miss Roache and Miss Smith in different accounts. Both biographies include "Anecdotes" or "Memoirs" of the mistresses. The *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* goes on to adapt the "Anecdotes of Miss Roache", published in the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack*[66] under the title "Memoirs of Miss Smith".[67] Neither narrative maintains a consistent timeline of Rann's mistresses, a confusion which later biographies attempt to correct by assigning only one mistress to Rann for both trials, the other's role being reduced to that of a witness only. In these later texts, the interchangeability of those two women is accompanied by their demotion to prostitutes. Where Roache was a kept mistress in both the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* and the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack*, she is reduced to a common prostitute in the *Malefactor's Register:*

> for some time past, Rann had kept company with a young woman named

66 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 24-28.

67 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 26-29. The *Genuine Account's* title page advertises "some Curious Anecdotes of Miss Smith and Miss Roche", but fails to provide any separate passages about Miss Roache. Although there is no way to confirm which text was issued first, the *Account*'s short biography of Rann's mistress was probably published before that of the *Genuine Account*, which summarises the *Account*"s content and is thus noticeably shorter. However, it is entirely possible that the text of the *Account* was itself reproduced or adapted from one of the lost biographies.

> Roche, who, having been apprenticed to a milliner, and being seduced by an officer of the guards, was reduced to obtain bread by the casual wages of prostitution; and, at length associating with highwaymen, received such valuable effects as they took on the road[68]

Begun in the sexually charged environment of the milliner's shop, the story of Rann's mistress is common enough to be assigned to either woman, since it is one of corrupt femininity. The one other woman mentioned in the Rann narratives, Christian Stewart, Eleanor Roache's servant and accomplice, slowly disappears from the biographies altogether.

Femininity as a whole is thus presented as at best suspect, at worse corrupt and corrupting, in biographies of Sixteen-String Jack. While the women function as familiar, and altogether interchangeable, tropes, Rann's care for his appearance and love for fine accessories put his masculinity, and hence his morality, in question. While the *Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack* squarely places the blame on bad female influences and on the highwayman's own lack of morals, the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* hints at a more problematic force behind Rann's bad character, his own femininity. Allusions to less-than-candid relationships between the thief and some of his supporters first appear in a single London newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser.* The report states “Great interest is now making for John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack, under sentence of death in Newgate, which has given occasion to a report against his intercessors perhaps derogatory to truth, and too illiberal for publication”.[69] No further explanation to this rather enigmatic assertion is given, and later reports make no mentions about intercessors or their illiberal interests. Only the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* expands on these allusions, a clarification which is reproduced in none of the later biographies adapted from

68 “A full and particular Account of the Life and extraordinary Transactions of John Rann, otherwise Sixteen-Strings Jack, who was hanged for a Robbery on the Highway” *MR79*, V:139.

69 *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Nov. 2, 1774.

that text.

According to the *Genuine Account*, Rann's corruption begins with a too-lenient master, allowing him to dress as he wished, possibly in exchange for favours of a sexual nature:

> In this station [as a coachman] he was a favorite; and, if our information be right, much too great of a favourite. His master used to allow him money to dress in a way far above his rank; permitted him to wear silk stockings, and gave him silk breeches with eight strings at each knee, from which he acquired, and has since much boasted of, the name of Sixteen-Strings Jack. It is irksome to say what might be said on this occasion; but a miss [sic] Smith, with whom this unhappy wretch has since lived, as been heard to say, that he was not a Woman Lover.[70]

This convoluted assertion is repeated later in the narrative, in a passage also absent from later adaptations of this text:

> We shall not endeavour to enumerate the crimes of a poor wretch already too much under the hand of affliction, as some others have done before, by insinuating he was not a Woman's Friend, when it is well known, that if he had not had more Love for them than his discretion could guide him in, he might at this day have been one of the most happy of men.[71]

Although the blame is quickly redirected onto a less disquieting target, women, the allusion to homosexual desire is clear. Coupled with his taste for finery, such hints define Rann as the unusual figure of the lower-class fop. According to George Haggerty, “Fops are always portrayed as sexually confused gender misfits. It is simply the reading of the misfit status that changes as the century proceeds. Another way of putting this is to say that Restoration fops are comically monstrous and later fops are morally monstrous”.[72] Haggerty goes on to underline the divide between the upper-class fop and the lower-class molly, and their respective function in eighteenth century culture: “Not quite a man, and not by any means a 'true' aristocrat, the fop is constructed as the parody of both

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70 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 7-8.

71 *A Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, alias Sixteen-string Jack: Who was executed on November 30th. 1724, for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford* ([1774?]), 26.

72 George Haggerty, *Men in Love : Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York & Chichester: Columbia UP, 1999), 45.

masculinity and aristocracy that exposes their own contingency".[73] Rann is never identified with either the upper class fop or the figure of the molly however. His sporadic experiments with upper-class gentility are never successful enough to be considered disruptive, and the satire is directed at the blundering highwayman, and not those he seeks to emulate. On the other hand, although his extravagant style and its corollary allusions to femininity are regularly ridiculed, he is at no point compared to the corrupt lower-class cross-dresser. Although the *Genuine Account of the Life of John Rann, Alias Sixteen-string Jack* clearly links his illicit preferences to his fondness for flashy accessories, both encouraged by his unnamed master, Rann lacks the satirical potential of the mock-heroic lower-class beau such as that depicted in Henry Fielding's fictionalised biography of Jonathan Wild.[74] The satire and condemnation surrounding Sixteen-String Jack and his feminine penchants is directed at the criminal himself, whose figure is no longer used to comment on corrupt figures of authority.

VII.4 Criminal literature in decline?

While previous criminal accounts coupled moralising and titillating content, Rann's story is almost entirely confined to its educational purpose. Despite featuring many of the classic tropes of eighteenth-century criminal biography, its satirical content (which is most often directed at the highwayman himself, and not at socially more privileged figures) is altogether shadowed by warnings against the highwayman's mistakes, whether repeated by those of his own rank, or by his masters. Rann's trajectory from servant boy to highwayman is thus detailed alongside his regrets in the London newspapers: "He lamented that he had not been under greater restraint in the places where he had been a servant; and likewise mentioned the ill examples of some of his masters".[75] Calling for

73 Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 61.
74 See my discussion of Tom Smirk, Leticia Wild's lover, on pages 111-12.
75 *General Evening Post*, Dec. 6-8, 1774. The same extract can also be found in the *Morning Chronicle*

proper regard for the benefits of education, the Rann narratives identify both his early dislike of schoolwork, as well as cultural disinterest in education over appearance as the cause for the highwayman's final demise:[76]

> His parents, in the early part of his life, had taken care to place him at school,... But being of a volatile disposition, and more fond of riding of horses than school discipline, he presently ran away, and forgot that small share of learning he had acquired in his childhood; and so great was his ignorance, that his conversation frequently caused mirth to his fellow prisoners.[77]

> His person being every way agreeable, he found means to be frequent at masquerades, assemblies, and other places of public resort, where education is not so much looked on as address and effrontery.[78]

Meanwhile, Rann's own brand of popular gentility is reminiscent of the later, nineteenth-century fictionalisation of the lives of famous eighteenth-century criminal figures, often featuring a noble and courageous thief, steadfastly loyal to his gang and opposed by a corrupt policing system. Although the warnings against the corrupting influences of problematic entertainments such as masquerades, gambling, and loose women found in the Rann narratives are very far from new, they become all-encompassing as the figure of the criminal is stripped of its potential as satire of powerful institutions. Where social ambition in figures like Sheppard, Wild or Maclaine become fodder in attacks over public corruption and upper-class superficiality, even mock-heroic treatments of Sixteen-string Jack direct their ridicule at the criminal, sparing his potential upper-class counterparts. The disruptive real-life thief, increasingly contained through changing legal structures and

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and London Advertiser, Dec. 9 and Dec. 17, 1774.

76 Their educational potential is also realised in the *Covent Garden Magazine*, which aimed to not only to provide "Entertainment [for] the Polite World, but also "the Finishing of a Young Gentleman's Education." *The Covent Garden Magazine; or, Amourous Repository: Calculated solely for the Entertainment of the Polite World. For December, 1774* (London: Printed for the Authors; and sold by G. Allen, N° 59 in Paternoster Row, and all other Booksellers in Great Britain and Ireland, 1774), title page. Here, the *Old Bailey Proceedings'* record of Rann's trial accompanies summaries of the latest plays, light poetry, card games rules, and extracts of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*, amongst other polite literary knickknacks.

77 *General Evening Post,* Dec. 6-8, 1774. This same passage was also published in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* Dec. 9 and Dec. 17, 1774.

78 *An Account of John Rann, Commonly called Sixteen String Jack. Being a circumstantial Narrative of his Principal Transactions, and His Amours to the Celebrated Miss La Roache* ([1774?]), 7.

narratives, slowly loses his appeal as a carnivalesque figure, and titillating, and often fictional, anecdotes yield to more factual reports on the thief's live and slow descent into criminality.

VIII – Conclusion

These six case studies of eighteenth-century criminals demonstrate the importance of representations of material culture in the narrative treatment of rogues' lives. In the Blueskin biographies, the thief's success is entirely dependent on his control over the material world. The footpad hence veers from ever-failing thief to picaresque trickster through his mastery, or lack thereof, over objects and bodies. John Sheppard manipulates the objects of imprisonment and the law to his own ends, turning incarceration into spectacle as he himself becomes an object to expose and gawk at. Jonathan Wild's disruptive power over strayed things grants him control over their movements between legal and criminal markets, and is extended to the life and bodies of the criminals he employs. Dick Turpin and his gang reject the easy sociability of the farmstead through the violent destruction and corruption of domestic objects and rituals, while Maclaine strives to infiltrate polite society through carefully-set costume and props, designating character and identity as portable belongings in the process. Finally, the flamboyant Sixteen-String Jack defines his own brand of lower-class gentility, and appropriates the Old Bailey and Tyburn rituals to express his innocence sartorially.

Each piece of life-writing attempts to contain the disruptive potential of these thieves while preserving the inherent attraction of the often immoral, yet exciting events and behaviours they depict. The criminals grow into vehicles for satire, and their life-stories are turned into critiques of behaviours that transgress norms of gender and class. In the early eighteenth-century, the figure of the famous rogue is inscribed within double-edged mock-heroic satire, which spares neither thief nor dishonest public servants. However, the censure is increasingly directed at the criminal and his social ambitions in the second half of the century: the Rann narratives thus become educational, instead of satirical. The thief

remains nonetheless a carnivalesque figure, circulating within a liminal underworld which operates outside of social norms and boundaries, but also mimics the very structures it rejects.

The thieves' sense of belonging to that world is constructed through their shared relationship with portable objects and things. The criminals strive to conceal the damning potential of their booty, their fate depending on their ability, or failure, to control the objects they steal. In turn, stolen objects become things, unable to reenter legal markets unless transformed, defiled, or made unrecognisable through distance or destruction. Where Blueskin, Sheppard and Wild exploit the booming London market to dispose of their goods, highwaymen Turpin, Maclaine and Rann attempt to maintain a safe distance between the locale of their thefts and that of their daily lives. As they sever the link between objects and their rightful owners through the act of theft, the criminals attempt to control and disrupt the circulation of goods on the eighteenth-century market. Meanwhile, some of these objects take on non-pecuniary worth, their legitimate owners estimating their value not over their resale price, but according to their own relationship with intimate, often irreplaceable, possessions.

The thief interacts with a wide array of objects; however, one particular type, dress, takes on a particularly potent quality as the criminal manipulates his appearance through disguise and appropriates and adapts the trappings of upper-class fashion. As such, clothing not only provides access to otherwise impenetrable social circles, but can also be used to assert status and superiority through apparel. The necessary meaningful items of dress are easily obtained in the London market, as clothing and accessories travel downwards, are stolen, sold or donated by their original owners, become available to buy second-hand, and finally make their way through each level of society until their function fails and they are transformed into paper. The unsettling power of things also invades the

thief's own body, which becomes part of a transaction between jails, courts, executioners, and surgeons, as well as publishers, biographers, and readers. Changes in modes of consumption and the eighteenth-century market are inscribed in the lives and bodies of these criminals. Their uncanny ability to control and subvert the material world provides an opportunity to critique the rise of a consumer culture and its unprecedented wealth of things whereby the acquisition of objects can enable vice to disturb legal and social boundaries.

Finally, the criminal life itself is an object to own, as the Drury Lane world of criminals, prostitutes and gambling pervades that of the hack-writers, journalists and theatre. Changing legal structures as well as public interest shape accounts of the lives of thieves. The evolution of the criminal trial genre thus affects that of criminal biography, itself a patchwork of legal, journalistic, and fictional texts, both in prose and verse. However, eighteenth-century criminal biography is far from a static genre. While changes to the genre of the trial account as well as policing practices impact on its form, the aims and anxieties raised by rogues' accounts also evolve. The physical breach of privacy operated by the house-breaker is mirrored in that attempted by the fortune-hunter, who also invades the privacy of the home, albeit through courtship and deceit, and attempts to steal human valuables, that is, single ladies and their fortune. Early eighteenth-century lives of felons are centred on the parallel between the thieves' corrupt practices and their legal counterparts in various iterations of the critique established by the *Beggar's Opera*. However, criminal life-writing later in the century comes to focus on their corrupting influences, and the satire is increasingly directed at their social ambition and failures to adopt middle- and upper-class standards of sociability and politeness. Adapted, recycled, and widely reproduced with or without consent from their publishers or (generally anonymous) authors, these texts raise questions of ownership and authority which parallel

that of developing standards of copyright. Pilfering biographers come to be associated with their subjects and their criminal practices, and the thieves themselves participate in the shaping of their narrative through public confessions, behaviour on the scaffold, or downright designation of one biography as the authoritative, official account.

Such an assortment of genres transforms criminal life-writing into a fertile ground for literary experimentation, in spite of their often formulaic narrative structure of corruption, crime and final retribution. Criminal biographies take advantage of their lowly and immoral subject matter to include unexpected literary forms and contents in their narratives. The violent and inefficient Blueskin becomes a picaresque hero, the corrupt Wild a mock-heroic target, and Maclaine a fitting subject for conduct literature, while Turpin's narratives experiment with the genre of the criminal trial, and Sheppard's escapes are contained and subdued through detailed explanations of his near-impossible feats. Through the process of fictionalisation, criminals come to represent a variety of one-dimensional types: the ever-failing thief, loyal escapist, corrupt public servant, isolated highwayman, fortune-hunter, and lower-class fop. Collections of criminal lives such as *Select Trials for Murder, Robbery, Burglary...* (1764) or James Montagu's *Old Bailey Chronicle* (1788) appropriate those texts published immediately after the criminal's arrest and execution, discarding, reworking, and combining their content in an often disorienting whole. The figure of the thief, then, is not round nor consistent. Instead, he becomes an archetype, onto which the 'facts' of the lives can be grafted while focusing on their movement and effect on the material world. The thief belongs nowhere and everywhere. The portability of the thief's life both in terms of his 'real' existence (he moves from place to place, locale to locale, from low to high society) and his textual one (as small book, as an account moved from one genre to another) is an index of both the anxieties and pleasures of a culture increasingly organised around the value of objects.

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Mac-Dermot: or, the Irish Fortune-Hunter. A Poem. In Six Canto's. By the Author of the Art of Dress. London: Printed for E. Curll, in Fleetstreet, 1719 [1717].

Mackdonald. *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Pirates, Street-Robbers, and Thief-Takers. Particularly The Four last most noted Villains, viz. MacDaniel, Salmon, Eagan and Berry. As also of that notorious Accomplice of theirs, Mary Jones and Others. Shewing The diabolical Arts by them practised, to get innocent Persons convicted for Robberies, and to share amongst themselves the Rewards paid for such Convictions. The whole interspersed with several diverting Tales, embellished with the Heads of the most remarkable Villains, neatly engraved. By Capt. Mackdonald.* London: Printed for J. Warcus's, at the Indian Queen at the Poultry, and H. Serjeant, at the Star without Temple Bar, 1758.

[MGHL58]

MackLecan, James. *A General and True History of the Lives and Actions Of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Street-Robbers, Pirates, &c. Interspers'd with several Remarkable Trials Of the most Notorious Malefactors, at the Sessions-House in the Old-Baily.* London, &c. Oxford: Printed by R. Walker and W. Jackson, 1748.

[MGTH48]

Macklin, Charles. *Love à la Mode.* London. 1779.

The Malefactor's Register; or New Newgate and Tyburn Calendar. Containing the Authentic Lives, Trials, Accounts of Executions, Dying Speeches, and other Curious Particulars, Relating to all the most notorious Violators of the Laws of their Country; Who have suffered Death, and other exemplary Punishments, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, from the Commencement of the Year 1700, to the Midsummer Sessions of next Year. Together with numerous Trials in extraordinary Cases, where the Parties have been Acquitted. This Work also comprehends all the most material Passages in the Sessions-Papers for a long Series of Years, and complete Narratives of all the Capital Trials for Bigamy, Burglary, Felony, Forgery, Footpad-Robbery, Highway-Robbery, High-Treason, Horse-Stealing, Murder, Petty-Treason, Piracy, Rapes, Riots, Mobbing, Street-Robbery, Unnatural Crimes, And various other Offences, and Midemeanors [sic]. To which is added, the correct List of all the

Capital Convictions at the Old Bailey, &c. &c. &c. since the Commencement of the present Century; which will be of the highest Use to refer to on many Occasions. The Whole tending, by a general Display of the Progress and Consequence of Vice, to impress on the Mind proper Ideas of the Happiness resulting from a Life of strict Honour and Integrity: And to convince Individuals of the superior Excellence of those Laws framed for the Protection of our Lives and Properties. Offered not only as an Object of Curiosity and Entertainment, but as a Work of real and substantial Use. Embellished with a most elegant and superb Set of entire New Copper Plates, finely engaved [sic] by original Designs by Wale, Dodd, and Others. London: Printed, by Authority, only for Alex. Hogg, No. 16, Pater-noster Row, 1779. [MR79]

Mandeville, Bernard. *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn: and A Proposal for some Regulations concerning Felons in Prison, and the good Effects to be Expected from them. To which is Added, A Discourse on Transportation, and a Method to render that Punishment more Effectual. By B. Mandeville, M.D.* London: Printed: And Sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1725.

A Master-Key to the Rich Ladies Treasury, or the Widower and Batchelor Directory. Containing an exact Alphabetical List of Duchess, Marchioness, Countess, Viscountess, Baroness Dowagers, Ladies by Curtesie, Daughters of Peers, Baronet Widows, Widows, and Spinsters in Great Britain. With an Account of their Places of Abode, reported Fortunes, and Fortune they possess in the Stocks. By a Younger Brother. London: Printed for J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1742.

M –c L–n's Cabinet broke open; or, His private List of all the Duchess Dowagers, Countesses, Widow Ladies, Maiden Ladies, Widows and Misses of Honour, Virtue, and Large Fortunes in England: Together With their several Places of Abodes, And also His Charge and Advice to the Honourable Society of Hibernieans: With their Orders and Resolutions. London: Printed for Patrick McLaughter, near St. Paul's. 1750.

Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny M. London: Printed for M. Thrush, at the King's-Arms, in Salisbury-Court, Fleet-Street, 1758-9.

Merry, Andrew. *The Last Dying Words of the Eighteenth Century. A Pindarick Ode. Giving a humourous and chronological Detail of all the remarkable Events, Fashions, Characters, &c. &c. By Andrew Merry, Esq.* London: Printed by J. Barker, Great Russell-Street, Covent Garden: for J. Lee, no. 77, Fleet-Street; C. Chappell, no.66, Pall-Mall; and S. Reed, no. 444, Strand, 1800.

Moffat, Margaret. *Margaret Moffat, at the Golden Key, in Lancaster-Court near the Strand, near St. Martin's Church*. London: , [1769?].

Montagu, James. *The Old Bailey Chronicle; Containing a circumstantial Account of the Lives, Trials, and Confessions of the most notorious Offenders who have suffered Death, and other exemplary Punishments, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, from the Commencement of the Year 1700, to the End of the Year 1788, for Bigamy, Burglary, Felony, Forgery, Footpad Robbery, Highway Robbery, High-Treason, Horse-Stealing, Murder, Petit-Treason, Perjury, Piracy, Rapes, Riots, Street-*

Robbery, and various other Offences and Misdemeanors. To which is Added, The Ordinary of Newgate's Account of every Capital Malefactor executed this Century. Properly arranged from the Records of Court, by James Mountague, Esq. Of the Temple. London : printed, by Authority, for S. Smith, Paternoster-Row; and sold by all Booksellers and News-carriers in Great Britain and Ireland, 1788.

[MOBC88]

Moreton, Andrew. *Second Thoughts are best: or, a Further Improvement of a Late Scheme to prevent Street Robberies: By which our Streets will be so strongly guarded, and so gloriously illuminated, that any part of London will be as safe and pleasant at Midnight as at Noonday; and Burglary totally impracticable; With some Thoughts for suppressing Robberies in all the publick Roads of England &c. Humbly offered for the Good of his Country, Submitted to the Consideration of the Parliament, and dedicated to his sacred Majesty King George Iind. By Andrew Moreton, Esq.*. London: Printed for W. Meadows, at the Angel in Cornhil; and sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1729.

A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard, Giving an Exact Description of the manner of his wonderful Escape from the CASTLE in Newgate, and of the Methods he took afterwards for his Security. Written by himself during his Confinement in the Middle Stone-Room, after his being retaken in Drury-Lane. To which is added, a true Representation of his Escape from the Condemn'd Hold, curiously Engraven on a Copper Plate. The whole Publish'd at the particular Request of the Prisoner. London: Printed and Sold by John Applebee, a little below Bridewell-Bridge, in Black-Fryers, 1724.

Newgate's Garland: Being, a New Ballad, Shewing, how Mr. Jonathan Wild's Throat was cut from Ear to Ear, with a Penknife by Mr. Blake, alias Blueskin, the bold Highwayman, as he stood at his Trial at the Old Bailey. To the Tune of, the Cut-purse. London: [?], 1724.

Newgate's Lamentation or the ladys last farewell of Maclean. [1750?] (Etching. British Museum Number: 1851,0308.411)

New News: great and wonderful News from London in an Uproar; or a How [sic] and Cry after the great Turpin, with his Escape into Ireland. [London?], [1737?].

News from the Dead: or, a Dialogue between Blueskin, Shepperd and Jonathan Wild. London: Printed by J. Thompson, in the Strand, [1725?].

N.P. *Weighley, alias Wild. A Poem, in Imitation of Hudibras. To which is annex'd, a more genuine and particular Account in Prose, than any yet publish'd, of the most remarkable Events, and Transactions, of his Life, from the Time of his Birth to his Execution. Also Jonathan's last Farewell and Epitaph, with a Song, never before Printed. By N.P. many Years his intimate Acquaintance.* London: Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford-Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1725.

A Petition to the Right Hon. Mr. – , In Favour of Mr. Maclean. By a Lady. London: Printed for G. Smith, near Temple Bar, Fleetstreet, 1750.

A Present for a Young Lady. Containing a Variety of Poems, Songs, Epigrams, &c. By Several Eminent Hands. Particularly, the D— of W—n, Dr. Garth, Dean S—t, Mr. John Hughs, Mr. Thompson, Mrs C—r. London: printed for Jacob Robinson, 1743.

Priestley, Chris. *Jail-Breaker Jack*. London: Hodder Children's Books, 2001.

The Prison-Breaker; or, the Adventures of John Sheppard, a Farce. As intended to be Acted at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's-Inn Fields. London: Printed for A. Moore, near St. Pauls, 1725.

The Quaker's Opera, As it is Perform'd at Lee's and Harper's Great Theatrical Booth in Bartholomew-Fair. With the MUSIC prefix'd to each SONG. London: Printed for J.W. And sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane; A. Dodd, at the Peacock without Temple-Bar; and E. Nutts and E. Smith at the Royal Exchange, 1728.

A Ramble Through London: Containing Observations in Men and Things. By a True-Born Englishman. London: Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford-Arms, in Warwick-Lane; Edward Withers, at the Seven Stars against the End of Chancery-Lane, in Fleetstreet; J. Jolliffe, at the Bible in St. James's-Street: and Sold by the rest of the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1738.

The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and about the City of London. With the Thief-Takers Proclamation. Also An Account of all the Flash Words now in Vogue amongst the Thieves; with an Explanation of each Word. With an exact List of the Convicts Names that was Condemn'd in the Year 1717 that now lies in Newgate to Plead to his Majesty's Transportation Pardon. By a Prisoner in Newgate. London: Printed for T. Warner, at the Black Boy in Pater-Noster-Row, 1718.

A Select and Impartial Account of the Lives, Behaviour, and Dying Words, of the most remarkable Convicts, From the Year 1700, down to the present Time. Containing Amongst many Others the following, viz. Herdman Strodman, for the barbarous Murder of Peter Wolter, his Fellow-Apprentice. Thomas Cook, the Gloucester Butcher, for the Murder of Mr. John Cooper, a Constable in May Fair. John Morgridge, for the Murder of Lieut. Cope, at the Tower. Mr. Gregg, Clerk to the late Secretary Harley, earl of Oxford, for holding Correspondence with Her Majesty's Enemies. Richard Town, Tallow-Chandler, the only Person who was executed on the Bankrupt Act. Col. Oxburgh, Richard Gascoigne, Esq., Justice Hall, and Parson Paul, for High-Treason. Marquiss [sic] de Paleotti, for stabbing his Servant. Lieutenant Bird, for the Murder of Sam. Loxton, at a Bagnio. Matthias Brinsden, for the Murder of his Wife. Capt. John Massey, for Piracy. Capt. John Stanley, for the Murder of Mrs. Maycock. Jonathan Wild, the Thief-Taker, for several Felonies. London: Printed by J. Applebee, for J. Hodges, at the Looking-Glass on London-Bridge, and sold also by C. Corbett, at Addison's-Head, opposite St. Dunstan's-Church, in Fleet-Street, 1760.

[SIAL60]

Select Trials at the Session-House in the Old Bailey, For Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, Bigamy, and other Offences. To which are added, Genuine Accounts of the Lives, Behaviours, Confessions and Dying Speeches of the most

Eminent Convicts. In four Volumes. From the Year 1720 to this Time. Amongst a great many other remarkable Trials, are For Murder. James Hall, Sarah Malcolm, T.Billings, T.Wood, and Catherine Hayes, Capt. John Jayne, Richard Savage, James Clough, Lewis Houssard, Major J. Honeby, Burnworth, Blewit and their Gang, T.Athoe and his Son, &c. &c. &c. For the Highway. W.Gordon, W.Wreathock and his Gang, T.Carr and E.Adams, Mary Young alias Jenny Diver, James Daltom, &c. &c. &c. For Forgery. Richard Brabant, Parson Kinnersley, and W.Hales, &c. &c. &c. For Rapes and Attempts to Ravish, Arthur Gray, Samuel Street, Col. Charteris, William West, &c. &c. &c. For receiving stolen Goods. J. Barthelemi, Jonathan Wild, &c. &c. &c. For Sodomy and Sodomitical Practices. Margaret Clap, Charles Hitchin, &c. &c. &c. London: Printed by J. Applebee in Bolt-Court, Fleet-Street, For James Hodges, at the Looking-Glass, over-against St. Magnus-Church, London-Bridge, 1742.

[STSH42]

Select Trials for Murder, Robbery, Burglary, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Forgery, Pyracy, and other Offences and Misdemeanours, at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey, to which are added Genuine Accounts of the Lives, Exploits, Behaviour, Confessions, and Dying-Speeches, of the most notorious Convicts, from the year 1741 to the present year, 1764, inclusive; which completes the trials from the year 1720. In Four Volumes. London : printed for J. Wilkie, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1764.

[STMR64]

Select Trials for Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, And other Offences: At the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey. To which are Added, Genuine Accounts of the Lives, Behaviour, Confessions and Dying-Speeches of the most Eminent Convicts. London: Printed for J. Wilford, behind the Chapter-House, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1735.

[ST35]

Sheppard in Aegypt, or News from the Dead. Being a Letter from John Sheppard to Frisky Moll, and his Executor. Giving a most entertaining Account of his Arrival and Reception at Styx, with sundry remarkable Adventures as have happened to himself, to Blueskin and Houssare, the French Barber, and to many other defunct Robbers, Murderers, Traitors, &c. Together with the Censures passed on the late Night Scene of Harlequin Sheppard and the Play of Caesar in Aegypt at the Shades. Also a Poetic Epistle from Charon to Jonathan W-d, with many other curious Particulars. London: Printed for A. Dodd at the Peacock, and W. Bristowe nest the Rose Tavern without Temple-Bar; and sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1725.

Smith, Alexander. *A Compleat History of the Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highway-men, Foot-pads, Shop-Lifts, and Cheats, of both Sexes, in and about London and Westminster, and all Parts of Great Britain for above a Hundred Years past, continu'd to the present Time. Wherein their most Secret and Barbarous Murders, Unparallel'd Robberies, Notorious Thefts, and Unheard of Cheats, are set in a true Light, and expos'd to publick View, for the common Benefit of Mankind. To which is prefix'd, the Thieves New Canting-Dictionary, Explaining the most mysterious Words, New Terms, Significant Phrases, and Proper Idioms, used at this present Time by our Modern Thieves. By Capt. Alex. Smith. The Fifth Edition (adorn'd with cuts) with the addition of near Two Hundred Robberies lately*

committed London : printed for Sam. Briscoe, and sold by A. Dodd at the Peacock without Temple-Bar, 1719.

–-. *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Together with the History and Lives of Modern Rogues, Several of 'em his Acquaintance, that have been executed before and since his Death, for the High-Way, Pad, Shop-Lifting, House-Breaking, Picking of Pockets, and impudent Robbing in the Street, and at Court. Never before made Publick. Written by Capt. Alexander Smith, Author of the History of the High-Way-Men in three Volumes. Royal Concubines and Gamesters. Intermixt with strange Discoveries of several unheard of Barbarous Murders; all taken out of the Records of Newgate, continued down to the Present Time. Adorned with Cuts.* London: Printed for Sam. Briscoe, at the Bell-Savage on Ludgate-Hill. and Sold By J. Jackson in the Pall Mall. J. Isted, J. Crockatt, and T. Worrall in Fleet-Street, 1726. [SMLT26]

The Thief-Catcher; Or, Villainy Detected. Containing An ample Discovery of the many surprising Tricks, Subtilties [sic], and Frauds, now practised by Highwaymen, Street-Robbers, Gamblers, Sweetners, Tickers, Gypsies, Horse-Stealers, Sneaks, Jacobs, Money-changers, Coiners, Traps and Rogues of all Denomination. And a Detection of the Mischiefs arising from the vast Numbers of Pettifoggers, Bailiffs and their Followers, by whose Oppression Multitudes of our able Artists, useful Manufacturers, &c. croud the various Goals of this Kingdom. By a Lover of his Country. London: Printed for W. Owen at Homer's-Head, near Temple-Bar, 1753.

The Trial Of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, at York Assizes, on the 22d Day of March, 1739, before the Hon. Sir William Chapple, Knt. Judge of Assize, and one of His Majesty's Justice of the Court of King's Bench. Taken down in Court by Mr. Thomas Kyll, Professor of Shorthand. To which is prefix'd, an exact Account of the said Turpin, from his first coming into Yorkshire, to the Time of his being committed Prisoner to York Castle; communicated by Mr. Appleton of Beverley, Clerk of the Peace for the East-Riding of the said County. With a Copy of a Letter which Turpin received form[sic] his Father, while under Sentence of Death. To which is added, his Behaviour at the Place of Execution, on Saturday the 7th of April, 1739. Together with the whole Confession he made to the Hangman at the Gallows; wherein he acknowledg'd himself guilty of the Facts for which he suffer'd, own'd the Murder of Mr. Thompson's Servant on Epping-Forest, and gave a particular Account of several Robberies which he had committed. York: Printed by Ward and Chandler Booksellers, at their Printing-Office in Coney-Street; and Sold at their Shop without Temple-Bar, London, 1739.

The Tyburn Chronicle: Or, Villainy Display'd in all its Branches. Containing an Authentic Account of the Lives, Adventures, Tryals, Executions, and last Dying Speeches of the most notorious Malefactors Of all Denominations, Who have suffered for Bigamy, Forgeries, Highway-Robberies, House-Breaking, Murders, Perjury, Piracy, Rapes, Riots, Sodomy, Starving, Treason, And other the most enormous Crimes. The Whole being the most faithful Narrative ever yet Published of the various Executions, and other Punishments, In England, Scotland, and Ireland, From the Year 1700, to the present Time. London : printed for J. Cooke, at Shakespear's - Head, in Pater-noster-Row, 1768.

[TC68]

Thurmond, John. *Harlequin Sheppard. A Night Scene in Grotesque Characters: As it is Perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. By John Thurmond, Dancing-Master. With new Scenes painted from the Real Places of Action. To which is Prefix'd An Introduction, Giving an Account of Sheppard's Life: With a Curious Frontispiece representing Harlequin Sheppard*. London: Printed: and Sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, and A. Dodd at the Peacock without Temple-Bar, 1724.

The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure: Containing News, Letters, Debates, Poetry, Musick, Biography, History, Geography, Voyages, Criticism, Translations, Philosophy, Mathematicks, Husbandry, Gardening, Cookery, Chemistry, Mechanicks, Trade, Navigation, Architecture, and other Arts and Sciences; Which may render it Instructive and Entertaining to Gentry, Merchants, Farmers and Tradesmen. To which occasionally will be added An Impartial Account of Books in several Languages and of the State of Learning in Europe. Also Of the Stage, New Operas, Plays and Oratorios. Vol. VII. Published Monthly according to Act of Parliament. London: By John Hinton at the Kings-Arms in St. Pauls Church Yard, 1750.

A View of London and Westminster: or, the Town Spy. London: Sold by T. Warner at the Black-Boy in Pater-noster-Row, and by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1728 [1725?]

Villette, John (et alii). *The Annals of Newgate; or, Malefactors Register. Containing a particular and circumstantial Account of the Lives, Transactions, and Trials of the most notorious Malefactors, who have suffered an ignominious Death for their Offences, viz. for Parricide, Murder, Treason, Robbery, Burglary, Piracy, Coining, Forgery, and Rapes: From the Commitment of the celebrated John Sheppard, to the Acquittal of the equally celebrated Margaret Caroline Rudd. Including a Period of fifty Years and upwards, both in Town and Country. Calculated To expose the Deformity of Vice, the Infamy and Punishments naturally attending those who deviate from the Paths of Virtue; and intended as a Beacon to warn the rising Generation against the Temptations, the Allurements, and the Dangers of bad Company. The former Part extracted from Records; and the Histories and Transactions of the modern Convicts, communicated by the unhappy Sufferers themselves, since the Author has been appointed to his present Office. By the Rev. Mr. Villette, Ordinary of Newgate, and others.* London : printed for J. Wenman, No. 144, Fleet-Street, and sold by all other Booksellers, 1776.

[VANM76]

Walpole, Horace. “Numb. 103, Thursday, Dec. 19, 1754.” The World. By Adam Fitz-Adam. Volume the Third. London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-mall, 1755 (286-296).

–-. “From JAMES MACLAINE, Friday 10 November 1749 OS.” *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence.* Edited by W.S. Lewis. New Haven: Yale UP, 1937-1983 (XL:63-65).

–-. “To MANN, Thursday 2 August 1750 OS .” *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence.* Edited by W.S. Lewis. New Haven: Yale UP, 1937-1983 (XX:

165-171).

---. "To MANN, Wednesday 26 May 1742 OS." *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence.* Edited by W.S. Lewis. New Haven: Yale UP, 1937-1983 (XVII: 434-40).

The Wandering Whore: A Dialogue between Magdalena, a Crafty Bawd, Julietta, an Exquisite Whore, Francion, a Lascivious Gallant, and Gusman a Pimping Hector. Discovering their Diabolical Practises at the Half-Crown Chuck-Office. With an Additional List Of the Names Of the Crafty Bawds, Common Whores, Wanderers, Pick-Pockets, Night-Walkers, Decoys, Hectors, Pimps and Trappanners. Delivered to the Publisher hereof by a late Hector, several deep Pyemen, and dedicated Gamersters amongst them. London: Printed in the Year 1660.

Welch, Saunders. *An Essay upon the Office of Constable. With Rules and Cautions for the most safe and effectual Discharge of that Duty. By Saunders Welsh, Late High-Constable of Holborn-Division; Now One of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex, and for the City and Liberty of Westminster. A New Edition Corrected, And enlarged with, An Introduction containing some Conjectures for fixing the Original of that Office in England; And certain Historical Anecdotes concerning the Rise and Progress of the Society of Thief-Takers, and the evil Consequences naturally resulting from an Institution of that Kind.* London: Printed for C. Henderson under the Royal Exchange, 1758.

Where's Jack. Directed by James Clavell. London: Oakhurst Productions, 1969.

The Whole Life and Trial at large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin, At York Assizes, on the 22d Day of March, 1739, before the Hon. Sir William Chapple, Knt. Judge of Assize, and one of His Majesty's Justices of the Court of King's Bench. Taken down in Court by Mr. Thomas Kyll, Professor of Short-Hand. To which is prefix'd, An exact Account of the said Turpin, from his first coming into Yorkshire, to the Time of his being committed Prisoner to York Castle; communicated by Mr. Appleton of Beverly, Clerk of the Peace for the East-Riding of the said County. With a Copy of a Letter which Turpin received form[sic] his Father, while under Sentence of Death. To which is added, his Behaviour at the Place of Execution, on Saturday the 7th of April, 1739. Together with the whole Confession he made to the Hangman at the Gallows; wherein he acknowledg'd himself guilty of the Facts for which he suffer'd, own'd the Murder of Mr. Thompson's Servant on Epping-Forest, and gave a particular Account of several Robberies which he had committed. The Fifth Edition. To which is prefix'd, A large and genuine History of the Life of Turpin, from his Birth to his Execution; and of all his Transactions and Robberies, and the various Methods he took to concel himself. The whole grounded on well-attested Facts, and communicated by Mr. Richard Bayes, at the Green-Man on Epping-Forest, and other Persons of the County of Essex. York: Printed by Ward and Chandler Booksellers, at their Printing-Office in Coney-Street; and Sold at their Shop without Temple-Bar, London, 1739.

Newspapers:

Applebee's Original Weekly Journal
British Journal
Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal
Country Journal, or, the Craftsman
Daily Courant
Daily Gazetteer
Daily Journal
Daily Post
Dublin Gazette
Evening Post
Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser
General Advertiser
General Evening Post
Lancashire Journal
London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post
London Daily Post and General Advertiser
London Evening Post
London Gazette
London Journal
Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser
Mist's Weekly Journal
Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser
Newcastle Courant
Parker's London News or the Impartial Intelligencer
Penny London Post or The Morning Advertiser
Post Boy
Public Advertiser
Public Ledger
Read's Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer
Remembrancer
Universal Journal
Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer
Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post
Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer
York Courant

Secondary sources:

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Stage, 1660-1800 : A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment. Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-1968.

Baird, Ileana. "Introduction: Peregrine Things: Rethinking the Global in Eighteenth-Century Studies." *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Cultur*e. Ed. Baird and Christina Ionescu. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013 (1-16).

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Bermingham, Ann. "Introduction" Bermingham, Ann & John Brewer (eds). *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text.* London: Routledge, 1995 (1-20).

Blackwell, Mark & Liz Bellamy (eds). *British It-Narratives, 1750-1830*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012.

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commodity, 1600-1800" Bermingham, Ann & John Brewer (eds). *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text.* London: Routledge, 1995 (341-361).

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